

Class **252J**

Book **C549**

General Theological Seminary Library
Ninth Ave. and 20th St., New York.

Besides the main topic this book also treats of

Subject No.

On page

Subject No.

On page

PRESENTED BY

Rev. William Brewster

William - Wright

Beckford



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

THE
STEWARD'S RECKONING:

OR,

C. S. Maell

A Series of Sermons

UPON

THE TENOR AND CHARACTER OF EVERY MAN'S ACCOUNT WITH
HIS CONSCIENCE AND HIS GOD.

ALSO,

A SERMON,

SHOWING THAT THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST HAS NO
CONNECTION WITH CIVIL GOVERNMENTS.

BY WILLIAM A. CLARK, D. D.

Rector of All Saints' Church, N. York.

NEW-YORK:

N. B. HOLMES, No. 262, GREENWICH-STREET.

M DCCC XXXIII.

22214

252 J

C 549

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1833, by
N. B. HOLMES, in the office of the Clerk of the Southern District
of New-York.

NEW-YORK:

HENRY LUDWIG, PRINTER,
Corner of Greenwich and Vesey streets.

*Copy of a Letter from the Wardens and Vestrymen of
All Saints' Church to the Author.*

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The Wardens and Vestrymen of All Saints' Church, impressed with the importance of employing every lawful means for the advancement of true and genuine piety and religion, take the occasion now to express to you, formally and as a public body, what they have often intimated as individuals. They have witnessed, with thankfulness to the Author of all grace, the serious and happy effects produced upon the minds of those who have heard the sermons lately preached on the subject of the steward's account. And they are confidently of the opinion that these effects might, by the same blessing which has caused them, be rendered more lasting, if those sermons were printed, so that each member of the congregation, who desired it, could often

have the opportunity to recur to and peruse them. But they are far from thinking that the good to be derived from such a publication would be confined to the people of All Saints'. They firmly believe, that many others would be benefitted by it. That many in every christian congregation, who might read these sermons, would be excited to greater seriousness and greater engagedness for the interests of religion. With these views, the undersigned most earnestly solicit your consent to publish them, in such way and form as your better judgment may dictate.

Very respectfully, yours, &c.

(Signed,)

JAMES BURGESS, }
ELIJAH PECK, } *Wardens.*

RICHARD HATFIELD, }
PAUL A. SABBATON, }
GEORGE HEWLETT, }
NATHANIEL J. BOYD, } *Vestrymen.*
BENJAMIN TANNER, }
JOHN B. HUNTER, }
JOHN COOK, }
EVAN GRIFFITH, }

A N S W E R

GENTLEMEN,

As I cannot feel myself at liberty to disregard your deliberate opinions, hoping that your anticipations in reference to the publication of my sermons upon the Steward's Reckoning may be realized, and most surely willing and *wishing* to do all in my power "for the advancement of true and genuine piety and religion" among all men, but first and most especially with that congregation of people to every one of whom I am attached by so many endearing considerations, I shall yield to the proposition which your letter has expressed, and which has been very earnestly urged upon me from many other highly respectable sources. A prospectus for printing by the aid of subscriptions, will be immediately circulated, and in due time, by the favour of Divine Providence, the sermons in question will be issued from the press, in precisely the same language and style in which they were delivered from the pulpit.

Truly yours, &c.

W. A. CLARK.

I N D E X .

| | Page |
|--|--------------|
| Ability to instruct and improve others, | 117 |
| Punishment upon the misapplication | 218 |
| Afflictions, nature and design of, | 175 |
| Abuse, how punished, | 228 |
| Children, responsibility for, &c. | 41 |
| Judgments upon the neglect of, | 204 |
| Christ, the only resort, | 231 |
| Discrimination of Divine Justice, | 144 |
| Explanation of the parable of the text, | 15 |
| Friends, blessing of, treatment, | 38 |
| Abuse of, how punished, | 204 |
| Health, inquiry how regarded and employed, | 36 |
| Abuse of, how punished, | 221 |
| Hearers, duty of, | 11, 110 |
| Life and being, employment of, &c. | 24 |
| Abuse of, with what judgments visited, | 188 |
| Means of information and knowledge, | 29 |
| Abuse of, how punished, | 198 |
| Mental faculties, employment of, | 26 |
| Abuse of, &c. | 192 |
| No connection between the kingdom of Christ and civil governments, | 243 |
| Opportunities of benevolence, consideration of | 90 |
| Judgments upon contempt of, | 214 |
| Parents, blessing of, duty to, and abuse of, | 49 |
| With what judgments visited, | 206 |
| Preachers or ministers, duty of, | 10, 114, 119 |
| Property, from God, account of, to be given, | 65 |
| Abuse of, &c. | 209 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Reputation, who the Author, how to be employed, &c. | Page 77 |
| In what manner the sin of abuse punished, . | 213 |
| Sources of religious instruction, how to be estimated and improved, | 105 |
| What is the account required upon their abuse, | 216 |
| The dispensations of Divine grace through boundless mercy, in the institution of a church with its ordinances and privileges for the securing of eternal salvation. | 149 |
| Judgments upon the neglect and disregard of, . | 224 |
| Time of probation, value of, &c. | 129 |
| Abuse, how punished, | 220 |

STEWARDS' RECKONING.

SERMON I.

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

"Give an account of thy stewardship."

Truly, my brethren, I know not but that I ought to be startled at my own temerity, in naming to you a text like this,—a text which seems to convey upon the very face of it reproof and censure,—a text which would appear about to turn the pulpit into an inquisitorial tribunal, a seat of judgment ready to canvas and investigate, to weigh and to scrutinize every action of your whole lives and to pass the sentence of condemnation upon each of them. I have, therefore, omitted the concluding clause: *Give an account of thy stewardship.* Here I pause, lest I should alarm and wound the too nice sensibility of some of my hearers. *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

But there are two important truths, which, if well considered, will carry conviction to our minds, that no declarations of scripture and no subjects derived from them, however alarming, should fail of being announced and developed through want of courage in the preacher,—and likewise that there can be no congregation of people who are honest with themselves that should be offended, nay, that should not highly approve of the dauntless course which, without fear or affection declares “the whole counsel of God.” The first of these truths regards the preacher; his duty to himself, to his hearers, and to his God. If he acts conscientiously, he will leave no means unassayed, hide no threatening of the Divine Word which may tend to arouse the careless and awaken the slothful. He *must*, he *will* declare the truth, and the whole truth.

His preaching, again, must be directed to the hearts and consciences of his hearers. It is worse than useless to inform their understandings without enlisting their feelings,—his object is their improvement,—sin, therefore, must be rebuked, and guilty passion disturbed; and not till they are moved, till they are agitated, till they are terrified, will they be made better. He speaks too in the name of God, and to Him must account for the manner of discharging his embassy. It is impossible,

therefore, that he should dissemble or should fail to speak plainly with all boldness and courage.

The second truth regards our hearers, and is nearly allied to the first. It is summed up in a very brief remark : "Innocence and honesty shrink from no investigation." Those who are conscientious and sincere, who would deal justly by themselves, desire that their hearts and their lives may be thoroughly scrutinized and wherein found wanting exposed to their perception, that reformation may be the result. They do not listen to the preacher to be amused, but to be instructed and improved—to know themselves and their duty, and for what omissions, sins, and imperfections they have to repent and to amend. The closest sermons, therefore, those which come most nearly home to their hearts, and most alarm their fears, are heard with the greatest approbation.

If we give to these considerations their due weight, no apologies will ever be thought necessary, and no apologies will ever be required. The preacher will not hesitate in disclosing to his hearers the unvarnished truth in all its most disagreeable bearings; and his hearers will not decline investigations so salutary, so necessary to a knowledge of themselves, and so indispensable to their final welfare. And, indeed, were it not for this plain dealing, what

would be the use of preaching? Were the preacher to tell us only what we knew before, and afraid to remind us of the truths which we might dislike to hear, we should not be made a whit better by a thousand sermons. And were we, indeed, such as we ought to be, or were we as perfect and holy as the angels, this kind of discourses might very well suit our condition. Reproof might then sleep; warning be hushed; and the voice of the Christian minister be tuned to the melody of a fine instrument of music. But as long as we are frail and imperfect, and often froward and perverse in our ways, as long as there are dangers which lie in our path and difficulties of no small magnitude to be encountered, if we ever reach the summit of the hill of Mount Zion; if we hear the word of God, if we hear the solemn assurances of his Spirit, we shall infallibly hear truths unpalatable to a sensual appetite; truths at which corrupt and proud human nature is disgusted. And if we are in any measure devoted to the religion we profess, and willing to receive salvation in the way that Heaven has appointed, we shall listen to such truths with humility, with prayer for divine grace, and with every feeling of kindness to that faithful servant of God who announces them without disguise.

But perhaps these remarks might be spared

at the present time ; for, notwithstanding my first suggestion, I do trust that there are many in this congregation, I know there are some, and will believe that they all are of that class who are not afraid to hear the truth, and choose that plain dealing which presents sin in its real deformity and hides none of its dreadful consequences ; which strips from the hypocrite his mantle of deceit, and reproves vice wherever it is found ; which terrifies the careless, the negligent, and the lukewarm, with the threatenings of divine displeasure ; and while it pours upon the head of the contrite, the humble, and the faithful, all the blessed promises of a glorious immortality, opens the gulfs of perdition to the impenitent and unbelieving. You will not shrink, then, from the investigation which the text proposes ; nor will you refuse to hear the dread denunciation which follows it—“ *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*” You will thence enter into an examination of your hearts and your lives, will sift them with the care and the severity of an impartial judge, and see what reasons you have to fear the all-searching eye of Omnipotent Wisdom—inquire with yourselves how you could stand a trial in His presence, and what cause you have to tremble at the sentence of his displeasure.

This is the use, I conceive, to which the

text should be applied : a text, the first sound of which might thrill the soul—“ *Give an account of thy stewardship ;*” but which, if rightly improved, may yield “ the peaceable fruits of righteousness” to them who hear it. Jesus Christ proposes this text for our consideration. This is an authority which must command our most assiduous attention. Jesus Christ may one day say to us, in a tone that shall strike dumbness and despair through our souls—“ *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*” Let us then anticipate this tremendous reckoning, and by adjusting the account with ourselves, by foreseeing all the possible dangers of the Divine disapprobation, and by contemplating the terrors of such an event, let us derive that profit from the text which it was intended to impart, and which shall prepare us to expect with confidence at the last, not the displeasure nor the frowns, but the eternal approbation of our Judge. I propose, therefore,

First, Some remarks calculated to explain the force and general application of the text.

Secondly, From the important considerations suggested by it, a serious reckoning and account with ourselves.

Thirdly, The times and the manner in which God calls us to this account. And,

Fourthly, The alarming admonition which is addressed to every soul by a just view of the truths proposed for our investigation.

Attention to these four classes of reflections will show us what we are and with whom we have to do—what are the gifts committed to us, and what is required at our hands. And remembrance of them will create in every breast a trembling sense of accountability, an everlasting impression of the awful responsibility of beings, to whom the talents of grace are committed.

But, my brethren, I am not so vain as to think of producing effect by declamation, nor so blind to my own failings as to imagine the subject we are going upon should have no bearing against myself. No; I include myself with you, and in directing the text to you I address it also to myself—*Give an account of thy stewardship.* Let us unitedly implore the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and to guide us into all truth.

We propose, first, some remarks calculated to explain the force and general application of the text. No startling ideas can be excited by this simple proposition. *There was a certain rich man,* said our blessed Lord, *which had a steward.* “A steward was an officer who superintended domestic concerns and ministered to the support of a family, having the products

of the field, of business, and all financial matters committed to his charge for this purpose. *And the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.* He was accused of having been profuse and profligate, of having disregarded and even betrayed his trust by embezzling his master's substance. *And he called him and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee : give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.* Produce thy books of receipts and disbursements, bring the whole of thy transactions to an investigation under my immediate inspection, that I may see whether the accusation against thee be true or false.* But as if conviction was written on the very face of the culprit, and the whole train of his frauds laid at once open to the light, he adds the sentence of dismissal from office—*Thou mayest be no longer steward.*

This iniquitous person contrived by false entries, unjust credits, to secure the friendship of his master's debtors ; and his master, it is said, commended him because he had done wisely. But this *commendation* we are not to understand to have been *approbation*. It was simply an admission of the cunning and address of the unjust servant, who, acting upon his principles of dishonesty, had made a very

* See Clarke's Commentaries.

prudent provision for his own support. Here worldly wisdom is displayed, and from this our blessed Lord inculcated upon his disciples a higher and a heavenly wisdom. All the moral precepts which he draws from this relation it is not necessary to repeat now. There is one declaration, however, which above all the rest should never be absent from our recollection, and which pronounces condemnation upon thousands who are little aware of it—*“He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful, also, in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust, also, in much.”* Adopt this truth as a general principle, and make it a criterion of judging upon human actions; let the rule in all its strictness, convict or acquit us according to our exactitude in minor duties, and clearly will it be seen that it pronounces condemnation upon thousands who are little aware of it. That God shall enter into judgment with us upon small matters as well as great ones, the whole of this narrative, by our Divine Redeemer, most decidedly assures us.

What character is here attributed to each of us? It is that of the stewards of God. *“A certain rich man had a steward.”* That certain rich man is the Supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe, and you, my hearer, are his steward. His exhaustless treasures are committed to your charge—you are entrusted with

the management and disposal of his goods. The substance of this parable is well illustrated by a Jewish Rabbi. "The whole world," says he, "may be considered as a *house* builded up : heaven is its roof, the stars its lamps, and the fruits of the earth its *table* spread. The owner and builder of this house is the holy, blessed God, and man is the steward into whose hands all the business of the house is committed. If he considers in his heart that the master of the house is always over him, and keeps his eye upon his work ; and if, in consequence, he acts wisely, he shall find favour in the eyes of the master of the house ; but if the master find wickedness in him he will remove him from his *stewardship*. The foolish steward doth not think of this. For as his eyes do not see the master of the house, he saith in his heart, I will eat and drink what I find in this house, and take my pleasure in it, nor shall I be careful whether there be a Lord over this house or not. When the Lord of the house marks this, he will come and expel him from the house, speedily and with great anger. Therefore it is written. He bringeth the princes to nothing."

But we have a better commentary than even this in the admonition of an apostle. "*See that ye walk circumspectly—not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time.*" "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same, one to*

another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." "Moreover, it is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." It was just remarked, that the *certain rich man* is the Supreme Creator and ruler of the universe, and that you, my hearer, are His steward: that His exhaustless treasures are committed to your charge: that you are entrusted with the management and disposal of His goods. Highly honoured is that individual in whom the Lord of heaven and earth thus confides. Who among the fickle, perfidious, and trustless sons of men is advanced to this enviable distinction? Whom has Omniscient Wisdom thought adequate to such high responsibility? Wonder and be astonished—it is every individual of the human family. Every man is this steward of God. Every one has received His "manifold gifts of grace." We want not one moment's reflection to be convinced of this. We want only to consider what we are, what we have been, and what are the prospects before us, in one word, what are our blessings, to know that we are all entrusted with the riches of the universe.

Can detail, my brethren, be necessary to make you sensible of this truth, to make you know, assuredly, that Heaven has entrusted you with its bounties—not as your own, but as its stewards. Among these bounties, are *life and being, mental faculties, means of information*

and knowledge, health, friends, children, parents, property, reputation, opportunities of benevolence, sources of religious instruction, ability to instruct and improve others, a time of probation, and the dispensations of Divine grace through boundless mercy in the institution of a church, with its ordinances and privileges for the securing of eternal salvation. 'Take this catalogue, my brethren, this invoice of the goods of heaven received by us, leaving out of the list all our civil privileges, and can we but be astonished at the profusion of the Divine bounty. What more just application of the subject of the text than to ourselves? With this remark, I dismiss its discussion for this morning.

Entering into a reckoning and adjusting the account with ourselves, we shall, it may surely be apprehended, find a fearful balance against us; and with trembling concern think it well for us that the heavens are not at this moment opened above our heads, and the Lord Jesus descending with the tremendous requisition in his mouth—"Give an account of thy stewardship." Ah! under the chilling certainty that the subsequent sentence of rejection would follow—"Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." When that time, the coming of the Lord, shall arrive, may these fears and the unhappy causes of them be removed, be separated from us as far

as the east is from the west. When that time shall arrive, may God give us grace "To render our accounts with joy and not with grief."

To the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed all dominion and honour, glory and praise, now and forever. Amen.

S E R M O N I I .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

WE, my brethren, are the stewards of God; his goods, his talents are put into our hands; and for the proper use and application of them all we must give an account to Him in the last day. We receive from God our life and being, our mental faculties and the means of information and knowledge:—we receive from Him, health, friends, children, parents, property, and reputation.—He grants us opportunities of benevolence, sources of religious instruction, and ability to instruct and improve others.—He gives us a time of probation, and in the revelation of his Son, the dispensations of divine grace through boundless mercy, the institution of a church with its ordinances and privileges for the securing of eternal salvation. For all these gifts we are responsible to the donor. They are not bestowed upon us to be used to suit our own pleasure and caprice, but for *his* special purposes. He has a right at any time to call us to a reckoning. At any time he may say to each and every one of us *“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”* And if these his favours have been abused, have we neglected to improve our talents, and buried

them in the earth, or have we wasted them for naught and prostituted them to vicious purposes, he may add, and we have every reason to believe and to fear that he *will* add, the dreadful sentence of reprobation which follows, “*Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*” I propose, therefore, that we enter seriously into this reckoning, and account with ourselves, and thus avert, if possible, that trial, surrounded by lightning and flames of fire “when God ariseth to judgment and to shake terribly the earth.” I shall not stop to prove that God is the giver of every good.—The truth is intuitive : scripture, reason, and common sense demonstrate it. Nor shall I now bring a syllable in proof of the Almighty’s right to exact an account of us for the use or abuse of his favours. We shall by and by see that he does exact this account and often in a way that plunges the wretched culprit into anguish and despair.

I make the assertion, and am not afraid of contradiction—God is the giver of all good.—God is the giver of life and being—from Him *we* have received them,—to what valuable purposes have they been applied? Have we been sensible from whose bounty they were derived? and have we rendered the tribute of a grateful heart for the precious gift without which no other blessings could be enjoyed?

Alas, have we considered life a blessing or a curse? and which of these have we made it to ourselves and to our fellow-beings? It is not to be supposed, that any are willing to admit that the latter has been the dreadful prostitution of their existence. But has that existence been devoted to vice instead of virtue, it has indeed been made a curse to themselves and to the rest of mankind. Yes, and if life is devoted to indifferent objects and the end of our being forgotten, if it has not been consecrated wholly to the cause of virtue, to the purposes for which heaven gives us existence, what satisfaction, or what encouragement to hope for the approbation of our final judge can we derive from a review of its several periods. Ah, who, in looking back, does not feel that very little has been earnestly devoted to the end of his being; that that being has in a thousand instances been trifled away at the shrine of folly; or at least, to the service of objects, which, if they do not create actual remorse, afford no pleasure in their remembrance. Here then the account is against us.

If so, how shocking must be the reckoning of those who have not only trifled away and devoted the period of their being to unimportant pursuits, but have given it to the sport of chance and have even been willing to sacri-

fice it to the mad demons of pride, of revenge, of a vain ambition, of intemperance and of licentious dissipation. Such persons put their life in scales to be weighed against a feather, and were they to set down and reason with themselves coolly upon the blindness of their conduct, nothing but the most confirmed atheism could prevent their conviction of their folly and of the alarming tenor of their accounts. Let them argue the case with themselves thus:—What do I gain in exchange for my soul? I expose my life to destruction and what do I receive in return? A handful of dust—gratification of malicious passion—the honour of a day—a momentary pleasure.—But will these compensate for violating the laws of heaven? will these satisfy my conscience in the hour of death? will they appease the anger of offended justice? ah, will they quench the fires of the bottomless abyss?—No, no, an awful debt stands against me.

Such might be the reckoning with himself, of every covetous, every ambitious, every licentious, and every intemperate man, who put their lives to the hazard of a die for the gratifications of their passions. And such it shall be in that dread hour when the passions are annihilated, when the world recedes, and the curtain of eternity is about to be withdrawn. If in the present assembly there is one of

either of the classes alluded to, let me entreat him, by all that is sacred, and all that is powerful, by all that is lovely, and all that is terrific, to pause and reflect; to cast up the account with himself and to consider dispassionately and calmly in what manner he could reply to that voice from heaven which should say to him, “*Give an account of thy stewardship.*”

The next gift of God on which I propose an investigation with ourselves, in order to know what account we could render to Him when required, is *our mental faculties*. Time would fail us to speak of each separately; we must, therefore, be more general in our inquiries. The natural powers of the mind are diversified, in some stronger, and some weaker; but in every moral agent sufficient for the purposes of virtue here, and salvation hereafter. In every moral agent they are a rich endowment, which elevates him to a rank infinitely superior to the rest of creation, and for which he is accountable to eternal and omnipotent Intelligence.

Have we then cultivated our mental faculties with all that industry of which we were capable? Have we enlarged them and conducted them to those sublime heights marked out to us by Providence? Have they been devoted to the best and most noble objects? Have the

energies of our minds always been called into action upon those important subjects alone, which are worthy of the exalted characters we are destined by Heaven to sustain? We see uncommon sagacity, ready perception, acute discernment, superior judgment, quick and penetrating geniuses drawn out in business, in the pursuit of the sciences, in the improvement of the arts. But do we see the same intellectual powers displayed in the business of salvation, in the science of religion, in the art of becoming good?

Ah, my brethren, when we compare what we are in this temple of God, and in our daily attention to things divine, with what we have been in the affairs of the world, when we contrast our languor in one with our mental vigor in the other, have we not the best reasons to conclude that here also the account is sadly against us? The religion of Jesus Christ requires us to devote our "whole soul and spirit," every faculty of our mind to his service; and if our mental powers are brilliantly active in worldly matters; if there we can attend, can remember, can discriminate with more than ordinary accuracy, and in spiritual matters are always dull, can with difficulty keep our minds from wandering during the prayers of the church, with still greater difficulty can fix our undivided attention upon the

subject of a sermon for *thirty minutes*, and then can perhaps remember no more than the text, are we not conscious that we are unprofitable servants?—that we are not good stewards of the manifold grace of God?—that we do little better than to waste the treasures with which we are entrusted.

But if such be the reckoning with Christians on this head, what must it be with those who degrade their minds to a level with the capacity of the brutes? “If judgment begin at the house of God what shall the end be of those who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Miserable wits—blinded worshippers of Mammon—deluded slaves of popular applause—and stupid devotees of pleasure—“Who among the people,” says the prophet, “are more brutish than these?” Men who apply all the talents with which heaven has blessed them in ridiculing and blaspheming the fountain from which they are derived—men who consecrate them solely to the purposes of fraud, plunder, and rapine, or train them in the school of intrigue and dissimulation: and men who, by a course of sensual indulgence, blunt every faculty of the mind and gradually become as dark and as groveling in their understandings as the sinks of pollution are horrid to which they descend. It would be in vain to think of inducing many

of these people to reason with themselves, or to see for a moment the miserable waste of their intellects. 'Their account must be with their God, and in his hands we leave them.

The third treasure to be noticed which is put into our hands by the great Lord of the universe, for the use and due improvement of which we must one day render an account to Him, and for the neglect of which we ought, therefore, to subject ourselves to the strictest reckoning, is *the means of information and knowledge*. These, like the mental faculties, are not the same in all. The opportunities of instruction with many are more or less limited, and yet there are none in this favoured land whose advantages for acquiring information and knowledge are not great. Contrast our condition with that of the heathen world before the advent of the Saviour, enveloped in the darkness of the grossest idolatry—with that of Pagan nations now, bent under the superstition of ages of delusion and folly—contrast it with that of the ancient Jews, whose means of arriving at the truth were through types and shadows often impenetrable by ordinary skill; and contrast it with that of Christians who lived during the dark period before the Reformation, when the Bible was prohibited to the people and their only sources of light were the instructions of men as ignorant as them-

selves ; and then confess that the means of information and knowledge to the lowest capacity, and the most limited in opportunity among Christians of the present day, is an invaluable boon from the bounty of a gracious Providence.

But what has been our improvement ? what is it now ? and what is that of most Christians under such advantages ? Are they as enlightened and as well-informed as they might be ? Are error and superstition scarcely less prevalent, are there less monstrous absurdities propagated among *us*, than there were among mankind when darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people ? Do we any of us possess all the information and knowledge which it has been in our power to obtain ? Have we to this end exercised all that industry and zeal of which we were capable ? Have we never, through indolence and love of ease, an aversion to close application or a greater fondness for the trifling pursuits of the world, neglected and slighted opportunities of improving our understandings ? Are there not many important subjects upon which we know little or nothing, because we have not given them that strict attention which they merited, and which it has a thousand times been in our power to bestow ?

A great deal is said in palliation of error—

a great deal in excuse of ignorance—as, “that mankind are not to be censured for involuntary ignorance—they are not to be condemned for unavoidable errors,” and thus an entire want of correct knowledge upon the most plain and prominent subjects, and error in opposition to the clearest truth, are not only exculpated from fault but almost applauded. Such is the frenzy of the times, a false notion of true charity. As some audacious people take upon them to arraign, to try, to condemn, and sentence to everlasting misery the greater part of mankind, for not adopting precisely the same creed as they do, and seem to think that they themselves can never be happy in heaven unless they are assured that millions of their fellow-beings are at the same time writhing in the torments of the bottomless pit; so there are others who, with as little authority from the divine word, assume the right of acquitting and dispensing pardons to all sorts of heresies, and even of awarding to them the highest seats of the celestial paradise, and seem unwilling to glorify the grace of God in their own salvation, unless amnesty and even justification shall be published to all the disciples of ignorance and error.

We have no business with the judgments of God; and no more in the acquittal than in the condemnation of mankind. Concern-

ing the guilt or innocence of ignorance and error, the only inquiry should be to know what pains have been taken to obtain correct views, and to learn the truth. Has a due degree of diligence been always exercised? Have we sought for wisdom as for hid treasure? Have no favourable opportunities of being better informed been suffered to pass away unimproved,—and I will venture to affirm that there is not one person within the hearing of my voice, who, admitting his imperfect knowledge and scant information upon many important subjects in religion, and his consequent exposure to error, will assert that he has always used all that diligence to be more perfectly enlightened which he ought, and which he might often have done. Precious seasons slighted or deferred in expectation of better ones that have never been realized, reproach us all. How then does our account stand on this head? and how does it stand with those who have never devoted one moment to the study of divine things? scarce one to reading and not one to reflection.

What their account shall be in the day of judgment, we are forewarned by the Saviour.—It shall be more tolerable for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim for the most atrocious sinners of ancient time sinners whose abominable crimes, the sacred

ness of this place would not permit me to name; it shall be more tolerable for such sinners in the day of judgment than for them.

There are many branches of knowledge, many sources of useful information, not strictly connected with religion, in which we have opportunities of being enlightened. Without enlarging upon them, I barely remark that for these means also we are responsible. But I ask, brethren, what idea of responsibility, what thought of ever having to render an account, can those gay and trifling beings possess, who, with all the happiest means of acquiring knowledge in their hands, confine their studies to the fashions of the day, the plot of a novel, or the actors of a play. If slighted mercies, if favours contemned, if a Saviour mocked, and a God defied, be as deserving of punishment, as wanton and reckless crime, then I tremble for the account of these persons. And with thousands of others it is not more satisfactory. If they do not glory in their ignorance, they despise the paths of knowledge,—“They choose darkness rather than light.”

When we contemplate the world around us, consider the countless means which have been employed for the diffusion of knowledge, and observe the barbarous ignorance and stupidity which in too many instances still prevail; how sickening, how disheartening the view. Infi-

nitely more so, when we reflect that, for the abuse and contempt of these invaluable privileges, the unfaithful steward has yet to answer at the bar of inflexible Justice.

Here I shall close the subject for to-day, hoping that the remarks which have been made, may enable you to anticipate those which are to follow, and that all of us, by self-examination and by a due estimate of our blessings, may, each succeeding week, be prepared to give a better account of our stewardship. God grant us this grace. To Him be glory for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N I I I .

ST. LUKE XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

IN resuming the subjects suggested by this text, it will not be necessary to recapitulate to an attentive congregation the several reflections which have already been made. We receive the text as addressed to ourselves ; we receive it as an admonition to self-examination ; we consider Christians as the stewards of God ; with them he has entrusted his richest treasures, and they are accountable to him for their use and improvement. This account may be required at any time, at any hour he may come to us with the peremptory demand, *“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”*

To prevent our being taken by surprise, that all our accounts may be properly adjusted, and corrections made wherever they may be found wanting, we have proposed and commenced upon a reckoning with ourselves. But in this reckoning upon our faithful or unfaithful application of the gifts of heaven, we have yet proceeded no farther than to remark with regard to our life and being, our mental faculties, and our means of information and knowledge.

The next blessing in order, which demands

our attention is *health* ; and here may be applied many of the observations which have been made respecting life and being. Here, also, it may be asked whether we have always considered health to be a peculiar gift of God, for the preservation and prudent use of which we are ever accountable to Him. Have we returned the tribute of a grateful heart and always manifested our thankfulness, by devoting it to the best purposes ? Are, indeed, those who enjoy this favour in the highest degree, among the number who are most pious, most engaged about their salvation, most zealous and active in the cause of the Redeemer, or shall we rather look for these evangelical virtues among the sick, the decrepid, the infirm, and broken in constitution. And when is it, my brethren, that we all are most in earnest about eternal things ? Has it been in youth and youthful vigour ? Is it when perfect health and soundness enable us to give them the closest attention and most assiduous study ? Or, rather, is it not when we have been surprised by some sudden calamity, when disease and pain have begun to enervate both the body and mind, and when increasing weakness and debility have seemed to predict the approach of death ?

Few are those whose best days have not been spent in sin. Few are the happy souls

who can reflect that they have dedicated the flower and the vigour of life to the service of their God; and fewer still, that their best strength and energies have been devoted with as much ardour and animation as their declining powers. With too many, alas! it must be their bitter reckoning, that they give their health and their prime to the world, till at last they have only the weakness of disease and the infirmities of age to make an offering to the Lord. What an offering! What an unfaithful servant is he who thus wastes and abuses his master's goods! Let youth, let us all consider this; and may it excite in us repentance for the past, and amendment for the future.

But if we are accountable for health, if we are required to devote it to the service of God, we are also required to study its preservation and also are accountable for the neglect to do so. It is doubtful whether the most thoughtful are always sufficiently aware of this truth; and it is certain that there are thousands who never think of it. Did they, did they know and realize the frightful account they may be called to render, it would be an appalling ghost, haunting them with premonitions of Divine wrath, and infusing deadly poisons into their cup of pleasure. Health! how often trifled with and how little valued by thousands, is this best of heaven's blessings. It is thrown away, it is

sacrificed to every malicious demon which frenzy or folly can create. It is sacrificed to fashion ; it is sacrificed to amusement ; it is sacrificed to pleasures ; it is more than immolated in those midnight orgies, where youth and aged folly mingle in the same group of luteness and intemperance. Would to God there was any monitor which could arrest their madness ! Would to God that the truth of their accountability, in all its aggravated and fearful colours, could for a moment appear before them ; that a hand-writing upon the wall of their revelling-room could be seen by them, conveying the tremendous call—" Give an account of thy stewardship !"

Another blessing, concerning which we may well see how our accounts stand, is, *friends*. Who thinks that on this article he is responsible to God ? Who thinks that on this he shall be obliged to render an account in the last day ? Every wise and prudent Christian ; every man who has the fear of God before his eyes. Great is the blessing of true and faithful friends, and great is the gratitude required in return. To the goodness of Heaven alone is such a blessing to be ascribed. But here its bounty is as diversified as in all other favours. Some are surrounded by friends from their birth ; some receive them from a Providence profusely kind, without being sought. Others acquire them by

their integrity and virtue; and others, alas! seem to be doomed to wander through the world with hardly the blessing of one earthly friend. But few estimate them at their real value, or thank heaven with that warmth of gratitude which a heart truly sensible of every blessing dictates.

Those who have been deprived of friends, and those who have had the affliction of enemies—enemies cruel as the grave; unprovoked as unjust, implacable as revengeful, and restrained by no principle either of truth or of decency, must prize true friendship at a high rate, and be exercised with corresponding sentiments of gratitude to God. *God grant, my brethren, that neither any of you nor myself may ever forget the kindness of friends in trials like these.* Well may those treasure it up in their memories who have felt the truth of the wise man's saying, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." And "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

But if it be true that there is little genuine friendship in the world, it is also true that its kindest offices are seldom remembered. Indeed, among those who by their ingratitude and folly alienate the friends with whom a merciful Providence has blessed them, there are none

with capacity to distinguish them from their enemies. Appearances are never to be trusted. "A man may have a thousand intimate acquaintances, and not a friend among them all." Hence the adage—"If you have one friend, think yourself happy." If you have one true friend, thank God for the blessing, and prize it the more from the account you must give.

What is the office of a true friend? one that may be considered among the invaluable treasures granted to us as the stewards of God? Here, on this head, we may bring our investigation to a definite conclusion. The office of such a friend is to tell us our faults; to remind us of our failings and errors, and, regardless of our pride and self-conceit, to make us know ourselves. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." But have these wounds never excited pain which provoked our impatience, nay, our resentment and indignation? Can we not remember times when the admonitions of a parent, a brother, a pious companion, or a zealous pastor, have awakened our anger? And instead of making amends, are we not generally displeased with pointed, personal reproof? Here, also, then, the account is against us. Here, also, we have been unfaithful servants.

We leave the heartless, the jealous, envious, and malicious, who, as they deserve no friends,

are able to retain none long, to adjust their own reckoning.

The next blessing included in the enumeration as subjects for our account, and for the faithful improvement and care of which we must give an account to God, is, *children*. This article respects, exclusively, us who are parents; and could we at all times feel the responsibility laid upon us when we are made such by the providence of God, no other consideration would be wanting to ensure a faithful discharge of our duties. Ah! was the strictness of the reckoning to which He shall call us on our obligations in this case, and the dreadful anathemas which shall fall upon the heads of the easy, indolent, unthinking, or vicious parents, who have contemned those obligations sufficiently vivid in our minds, the terror of that thought would be enough. We should not then require to be told that the future usefulness and prosperity of our children depend entirely upon their early discipline and instruction; that almost all the miscarriages in life are to be traced to a bad education; that the happiness of the parent and that of the child are inseparable; that our own peace and comfort in old age require that we should teach our children, from infancy, the principles of morality, of virtue, and religion; and that those weeping parents, whose children

calamity and misfortune have slain and worse than slain before their eyes, have too often to add to all their other griefs, the reflection, that they themselves, by inculcating bad principles or by neglecting to inculcate good ones, have been the artificers of the daggers which are plunged into their own bosoms.

Must not every parent be sensible that children are a heritage and blessing from the Lord? Why then are not all parents sensible, also, of their accountability to him? And if they are, what can hinder them from bringing up their children in *His* "nurture and admonition?" This is to be prepared to give a strict and faithful account. It is the teaching them, both by precept and example, all the moral and religious duties. Their minds are to be disciplined and formed to habits of rectitude; and where persuasion is ineffectual to this end, coercion is indispensable. Humility, moderation, self-denial, patience, and industry, are virtues which require to be taught early; for if they are ever learned afterwards, it is only in the school of bitter affliction; and if not acquired, lasting misery and ruin are inevitable.

I have just said that where *persuasion* is ineffectual, *coercion* is indispensable. This sentiment may be thought too rigid by those whose false pity would, out of love, ruin their off-

spring : by those whose tender mercies, like the wicked's, are cruel. For what would be our ideas of the miserable parent who refused to force a sick child to receive medicine for which he had an aversion, from its being unpleasant or unpalatable, and by such a refusal became the occasion of the death or lasting disease of that child ? And can we form any better ideas of the parents who refuse to exercise towards their children that discipline essential to their mental health, and by this refusal become the occasion of their moral desolation and death, destroy them in early life or make them lastingly wretched ? Such compassion and tenderness is barbarity. Such kindness and affection is hardhearted and ferocious cruelty. Let us each inquire of ourselves whether we can wash our hands of this fault. Have we been as careful of the moral as of the physical health of our children ? Have we, when necessary, used the same coercive measures to insure the one as to preserve the other ?

Nothing has a stronger tendency to establish in children virtuous habits, than their observance of the Sabbath and their attendance on public worship—and where is the parent who is not sensible of this truth ? Where is the parent whose practice does not correspond with it ? Where the parent who does not, on Sunday, watch over the conduct of his children

with a holy jealousy? see that they attend church, that they behave devoutly while there, and while at home that they are employed in reading, in listening to useful instruction, or at least see that they are restrained from diversions inconsistent with the sacredness of the day?

I pray God that there may be no such parents in this assembly. And I pray that on this subject your consciences may be clear, and that you can quietly close the account with yourselves in confidence that it will be approved by your final Judge. But as to myself, brethren, I candidly confess that when I reflect upon the difficulties of the task imposed upon me as a parent, the great care and diligence and the still greater wisdom and prudence required. I tremble: I am ready to ask—*Who is sufficient for these things?* And I think there are few, who, upon an impartial investigation, will not find that the account is against them; that after all their supposed conscientiousness, they do in many things fall short, and are worse than unprofitable servants, not having done even that which it was their duty to do. They have reason, therefore, to fear *His* coming, who may say to them—"Give an account of thy stewardship."

How then ought those parents to shudder and quake who have been almost absolutely regard-

less of the virtuous education of their children? Yes; even regardless whether or not, by the cultivation of their minds, their moral condition were elevated above the brutes. Religious instruction they repel; while refusing to give it themselves, suffer it to be received from the benevolence of none else; but choose rather to let their children loose in the streets on this holy day to prey upon the peace of society, and thus, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, "make them two-fold more the children of hell than themselves." Weeping picture of human society! doleful prospect of the rising generation! distressing reckoning of parents with themselves, and awful their account at the bar of heaven!

It is not possible to form a more terrifying idea of judgment than by supposing that our very children, connected and entwined with our hearts by a thousand endearing considerations, may appear as witnesses against us, and through their accusations seal our final and unalterable condemnation. What an eternal reproach in the present life, and before the last great reckoning shall commence, what a never-dying wound to the soul of a parent must be reflections like these.

My son has been drawn into the society of the dissipated; he has contracted habits which are now invincible, which will destroy his body

and his mind, and perhaps be the cause of his damnation; and all this I might have prevented by suitable care and severity in his childhood.

My son has been reduced by indolence to want, beggary, and shame: and by them to the commission of a crime which has forced him to flee his country, and banished him forever from the paternal roof; and all this is because I neglected to form him to early habits of industry, and to impress his mind with moral principles.

My son is now the disgrace of his parents and connexions; he has proceeded from one vice to another, till conviction of theft and robbery has sentenced him to punishment for life in the cells of infamy—and all this has been occasioned by my indifference to his early education, by my not having brought him up in the paths of virtue and religion.

My son is doomed to expiate his crimes by the forfeiture of his life but I forbear. Tell us of the pains of tortures, gibbets, racks, fires, they are are nothing to the agony of reflections like these. God grant, for Christ's sake, that they may never be our own.

But if such be the dreadful *forebodings* of a guilty conscience, what shall be the reality of its woe. If such be the terror of the account into which the wicked child enters with his more inexcusable parent, what shall be the

astounding, the annihilating fears of the voice of the Almighty God, which shall say to this parent—“*Give an account of thy stewardship:*” give an account of thy children: give an account of the manner in which thou hast instructed and educated them: of the evil examples thou hast furnished them; of thy indifference and neglect to form their habits to virtue, which have blasted their usefulness in the world, made them a curse to society, and sealed their eternal damnation.

My brethren, wishing that our minds may all, both yours and my own, dwell most intensely upon these thoughts, I shall here close for the morning. God grant that we may so consider, ponder, meditate, and improve, as to “save both ourselves and those entrusted to our charge.”

Now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N I V .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship; ”

In pursuing the train of reflections suggested by the text, and calling ourselves to an account for the favours with which we are intrusted by God, as his stewards, and for which we must sooner or later render a strict account to him, the last blessing under consideration was that of children. On this, parents were exclusively addressed; and the younger part of the congregation may have thought it a subject in which they were not interested. But it sometimes happens that children, instead of being a blessing to their parents, are the greatest earthly curse with which they are ever visited. Their indocility, their stubbornness of disposition, their persevering disobedience, and their consequent habits of confirmed vice and dissoluteness, embitter the life, shorten the days, and bring down with sorrow to the grave, the reflecting parent. All the consolations and hopes of religion are often found insufficient to repel or quiet those distressing recollections, those heart-rending thoughts, which, like meagre famine or a consuming pulmonary disease,

prey upon the constitution, and prematurely sever the thread of mortal existence. .

Every youth, every young person within these walls, must be deeply interested in this reflection; must be excited even to the most painful emotions lest such should be the tragical effects of his own misconduct—his own early perverseness and folly.

The next blessing of Heaven proposed for consideration, claims the earnest attention of us all, but most especially that of the younger class—it is the blessing of *parents*. Here children of every age are in some way concerned. By investigating the account with ourselves we shall see, and God grant that we may feel, how much is to be apprehended in our last reckoning at the Great Tribunal. Ah! and how much is to be apprehended at any time lest the Lord in anger should appear to us before another hour, bringing to remembrance sins which *we* may have forgotten, and with the appalling requisition—"Give an account of thy stewardship."

None, surely, can be ignorant of the value of affectionate parents, or of the greater value of those of strict piety and virtue. You, to whom the life of such parents is preserved and prolonged, are among the peculiar favourites of Heaven. You enjoy a blessing of which tens of thousands are deprived, and for which

the most hearty thankfulness to God is no return. Did I just say that none, surely, could be ignorant of the value of affectionate and pious parents? Alas! it is seldom that any, while in possession of this blessing, know how to appreciate it as they ought. It is the deprivation that makes us feel and be sensible of its value. So wretchedly stupid and dull are we at all times, that we scarcely ever estimate truly any blessing but by the loss of it. This is the case in a most lamentable degree with respect to parents. That forlorn child whose look was never brightened by the smiles of a mother's countenance, nor his heart ever gladdened by the kind counsels of a father's voice, but from birth has been thrown out, an orphan, to the sport of chance and the mercy of the world, knows infinitely better the value and the blessing of parents than those who have always been basking in the sunshine of their affection and love. These who have seen the eyes that sparkled with kindness closed in death, the tongue whose prudent instructions were their guide, and the hands which were opened to bless them lifeless and cold, and all that remained of earthly parents conveyed to the grave and committed to their long home; and are left forever in this world but with the remembrance of their care and solicitude during the season of childhood and youth, know

infinitely better the value and the blessing of a father or a mother than such as still enjoy the comforts of their society and the benediction of their wisdom and experience, their concern and prayers.

Here then there has been an account of long standing against most of us. During the life time of parents we did not appreciate their true worth—those to whom the life of parents is still continued, are universally subject to the same fault. How can they improve faithfully a blessing of whose value they are ignorant? How can they be prepared to render an acceptable account? This consideration, however, shall in no degree extenuate or excuse the sins of a child towards parents; because ignorance of a favour is itself a sin—and if the occasion of other sins, only aggravates their guilt. Indeed, there are no palliatives for this ignorance; and if it exist and be productive of disrespect, disregard, and disobedience on the part of children to their parents, betraying, as such sins ever must do, a want of gratitude to the Author of all Good, the Father of our spirits, it shall enhance the terrors of their last reckoning. It shall neither suspend nor delay the call upon them—"Give an account of thy stewardship," for a single moment. No; it shall be put down in the account at the head of their offences. You will not be able to

plead when this call is made, or if you do so it shall only aggravate your condemnation—"I had excellent parents, but I was insensible of it till God took them from me. I treated them unkindly, I abused their affection and love, because I was ignorant of the true value, of the inestimable worth of such a heavenly blessing."

And why, thy Judge may demand, wast thou thus ignorant? The sentiments of nature and every thing in creation, every object around thee was a light to remove thy darkness. "Give an account of thy stewardship," for thy ignorance of my favours tinges with a deeper die the enormity of thy guilt in their criminal abuse. Let every one, above all, let every young person meditate most seriously upon this reflection. Reformation is always easy in youth. Reformation may prevent fruitless tears and unavailing regrets without end.

Reciprocal affection and love to a parent are the dictates of nature. The child's own heart, the first glimmerings of his reason teach him the propriety and the duty of such a return. But so depraved is nature that her voice has little influence. So blinded is the human understanding and so perverse the human heart that the results, which, from the better principles of less depraved beings we might expect every day to witness, are seldom seen and are oftener the painting of fiction than the history of real life.

We read nothing with more eagerness and delight than narrations of filial piety and affection : of children who, in the most discouraging circumstances, returned all that kindness, care, and attention which they themselves had received from a fond and doting parent. But alas ! these instances of superior virtue have too often no existence except in the prolific imagination of an author. They are not in character with our wayward nature. The longing eye may perhaps seek in vain to witness an exemplification of them among all the most excellent in the world who have come under its observation. These instances are so unfrequent and have been so from time out of mind, as to have converted the remark long since to a proverb, that "Children never have that attachment and affection for parents which parents cherish for their children."

And yet what can seem more unnatural than that this should not be the case ? Let the youngest child in hearing, and capable of understanding, listen to the things I am saying. What can seem more unnatural than that children should not have the same attachment and affection for their parents which parents always cherish for their children ? Ought they not to love their parents as much as their parents love them ? Do they not deserve to be punished, and will they not be punished by God himself

when they do not do it? Yes: he will call them to an account, and afflict them in his anger when they are thus guilty and wicked.

My brethren, what stronger proof can we have of our original depravity, of the corruption and perverseness of our hearts through our fallen state, than this defection, this want, this dearth, this scanty measure of filial virtue universally to be lamented. We are indeed a polluted race. "The gold has become dim, the most fine gold is changed." Human nature when first from the hand of the Creator, uncontaminated and pure, was congenial with every virtue, and capable of the most exalted perfection in all that is good, lovely, and engaging. Then filial piety might have been a spontaneous production from the heart of every son and daughter of Adam. And where we now find virtues of this kind existing in an eminent degree, and flowing from a heart whose native propensities seem attuned to their practice, we are almost disposed to conclude that some remains of original excellence are yet lingering on the earth. Happy the youth whose mind inherits some of these remains, and who, by the incentive of natural inclination, is affectionate, reverential, and kind. But more happy the youth whose heart has been regenerated and sanctified by the spirit of Jesus Christ, and whose conduct and behaviour, affections

and sentiments to a parent are, through the power of grace, all that God requires. Such persons may cast up the account with themselves free from regrets to disturb them; and were God himself to call for the account of their stewardship, they are at any time prepared to render it without apprehension or fear.

But in order to be thus prepared, four acts of submission, veneration, and esteem, must have been performed. *We must have revered the authority, honoured the judgment, respected the wishes, and returned the affection of a parent.* These are so many items in our account, each of which claims our attention; and deficiency in either of them may strike the balance against us.

First, then, to be able to render a satisfactory account of our stewardship on this article, the *authority* of a parent must be revered. In the patriarchal age, the authority of the parent was the supreme law to all his descendants; and a child continued to submit to it, *not till he was twenty-one years old*, but as long as that parent lived. The same reverence was enjoined by the commandment of the Decalogue. There the requisition to pay this homage to parents is without limitation of time. It is again enacted and enforced by St. Paul, as a command of Jesus Christ: "Children, obey your parents in all things"—and is thus, in every dispensa-

tion, made an obligation forever binding upon the child.

But by reverence, I do not mean a forced submission to the power and influence of parents. Such submission, not proceeding from a conscientious and willing heart, has not the merit of virtue. The authority of parents is a right founded in the nature of things, in the order of the works of God, and through the priority of existence. The virtuous child and faithful servant of God must see the propriety of that order, and out of choice, must submit to it. His reverence of the authority of parents must be a conscientious and scrupulous regard to their right to influence his conduct and opinions, conferred upon them by the common Parent of all mankind. Obedience, therefore, is not a task, is not irksome, but is a pleasure and the happiness of this life. Whatever contrary views or inclinations may suggest themselves, are at once sacrificed to the divine claims of parental authority. Reverence is the homage of the heart, the voluntary offering of a soul, whose highest satisfaction and delight, are, in being guided by a will superior to her own. Those youth then, who are obedient but through necessity, who complain of the severity of parental discipline designed only for their own good, who are always restless and dissatisfied under the restraints that are placed over their

passions, who consider themselves slaves during their minority, transgress when they can do it with impunity or without fear of detection, and rejoice to arrive at the age when civil law dispenses with their obedience, as though it were an emancipation from real bondage: those youth are not entitled to a particle of credit for having revered the authority of their parents. The account is against them. They are sinners, guilty and condemned by Heaven: and one moment's reckoning with their consciences would convict them in their own minds.

But this is not all. *We must honour the judgment of a parent.* And he who does not from the heart reverence his authority, can never do so. Parental precepts command respect, because they originate in the wisdom of experience. But he who disregards these precepts or has a disposition to do so, imputes them to ignorance and folly. One single act of wilful and deliberate disobedience, is saying to a father or a mother, "Thou art a fool." What horrid impiety! No wonder that long life should be promised to those only who have honoured their parents, and that the curses of heaven and earth should be denounced against such as dishonour them.

To honour the judgment of parents is to receive and treat with becoming deference all

their opinions, sentiments, and views. It is to admit that they are wiser than ourselves, from their having lived longer, seen and experienced more. It is, in short, to possess a little humility, and to be in some measure free from vanity and self-conceit—indispensable but rare virtues with youth. Youth is the season of vanity, and therefore during this period we are most frequently guilty of dishonouring our parents. Their opinions, sentiments, and views, have no weight or influence in the formation of our own. We imagine that we see and discriminate with superior discernment, and are puffed and inflated with the ridiculous maxim, that “Every generation grows wiser than the former.” Hence it happens that we hear a boy, a mere boy of eighteen, contest the point with his father concerning his injudiciousness in the selection of companions, or his unsuitable pursuits; and the girl no more than sixteen, with her mother, concerning the propriety of her dress and the proper objects of her amusement. What is still more astonishing assurance, and would seem to indicate that many of the rising generation were preparing themselves for the sovereign contempt of the virtuous and wise forever, we hear youth of this age even call in question the most serious and deliberate views of their parents, and with as much confidence as the most learned theo-

logian contradict and oppose those religious opinions and sentiments which they have entertained during their whole lives. If such inconsiderate and rash behaviour of youth, if this dishonour of the better judgment of parents be condemned by the decision of the world, by the good sense of mankind in general, how will it be viewed by Heaven? and what account shall they who are guilty of it give for their abuse of the blessing of prudent and judicious parents? What if in one of these fits of passion, for it is nothing else but passion, what if in the midst of such impious wrangling that voice of the Almighty should reach their ears—“Give an account of thy stewardship.” Let them think on this and amend for the time to come.

It is a third duty *to respect the wishes of parents*, and a disposition of this kind must be the source which gives merit to reverence of their authority or honour of their judgment. A benevolent parent may not always lay his commands upon a child when he makes known to him his wishes, and the time at length arrives as they both advance in years when it is perhaps consistent that he should not. But the virtuous child respects the wishes as much as he venerates the authority of a parent. *His* will, *his* desire when signified to him, is equal and the same as his commands. And as long as life remains this is the devotion of the pious

child. But poorly, indeed, will the conduct of those youth correspond with this character, who think there are no wishes but their own to be gratified, and totally regardless of the wishes of their parents, suppose that they may in every thing choose for themselves : choose their own pursuits, their own society, their own manner of employing their time, and may even choose their own place for attending Divine service.

The pious, the godly, the virtuous child, consults the wishes of a parent, because, in the last place, such a child *retains a parent's affection*. All that tenderness and solicitude, that kind care and concern, that benevolence and love with which a father provides for the wants and the comforts, and with which a mother watches over the helpless infancy and precarious childhood of their offspring, flow back upon them from the grateful heart of such a child. The emotions of his soul spontaneously prompt his discharge of every filial obligation : and to himself, to his parents, and to his God, he shall never be afraid to answer. My young hearer, is this the account which *your* consciences places to your credit? If not, think on your ill behaviour, repent and amend before it is too late. The time will come when you shall find no place for repentance, though you seek it carefully with tears.

When the clods of the valley are thrown over the coffins of your parents, and they are sleeping in the dust, then reflection may create your sorrows and regrets, then you may wish to atone to them for your disobedience and unkindness, but in vain. How fruitless will be your sighs and your prayers. To those ears which have been so often pained by your reproaches, your unkind replies, you may desire to make confession and to pray for forgiveness, but they shall not hear. Those eyes which you have so often suffused with tears by your angry features and gusts of passion you may desire to gladden by a sight of your humility and reformation, but they shall not behold: they are closed in the darkness of death no more to look upon you. And into those hearts which have a thousand times bled and been wrung with the keenest anguish at your perverseness and ingratitude you may desire to pour some consolation, some healing balsam, by your contrition, but they shall be insensible to your groans or your smiles; those hearts are now, alas! cold in the grave and mouldering to earth. Oh! then, gladden those ears, cheer those eyes, and soothe those hearts while yet they have life and power to return you the greatest, the best of all earthly inheritances—

A PARENT'S BLESSING.

SERMON V.

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

THE consideration of our being made accountable in a future world for our actions in this, is the great terror of the wicked. Was its certainty removed, was it doubtful in their minds whether the event would take place or not, they might sin with far more indifference than they do at present. The assurance of their mortality, of death speedily approaching them, alarms not their fears as do the prospects beyond. Against the terrors of death they are hardened and callous, because those of futurity are so much more appalling, that annihilation is the chief desire of their souls. They wish that death could be to them a total and eternal cessation of existence.

But the evidences of a future state of everlasting existence are so many and so irresistible, and the certainty, that in this state we shall be required to render an account of the deeds done in the flesh, is so absolute, that there has never been a nation upon earth among whom a conviction of these truths did not prevail. They seem to be impressed in such a manner upon the heart of every intelligent being, that

no art or device of wickedness, no ingenuity of Satan, can entirely erase them. It is an impression made by the finger of the Almighty. This is what poisons the cup of pleasure to the sensualist. This is what palsies the otherwise inexorable grasp of the miser. This is what affrightens, agitates, distracts, the last moments of infidels and libertines, and, in most instances, extorts from them a solemn recantation of their profane and sceptical principles. This addresses the startled soul in a language not to be misunderstood, and as audible as the voice of God, speaking from out of heaven in a tone which rent the rocks and made the earth to quake. "*Give an account of thy stewardship.*"

Let us familiarize ourselves to this voice. Let us seem to hear this call at all times and in all places. A call which we can never forget as long as we remember there is another world, into which we are rapidly hastening. And a call which we shall one day assuredly hear in such a manner that the whole earth will be astonished, and the heavens become horribly afraid.—"*Give an account of thy stewardship.*" The admonition of the Holy Spirit therefore is, "*Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace.*" If we become familiarized to *his* voice, if we listen to and hear incessantly *his* imperative call, we shall be drawn towards him by the influences of his grace, we

shall be more and more assimilated with his own divine nature, our accounts will always be laid open before him, and our chief study will be to meet his approbation, our desires shall flow to and mingle with the expanse of his love, and our whole souls be lost in the ocean of Deity ; so that the dark clouds and angry thunders of Divine justice shall only mutter and be seen at a distance, and shall never, either in life, in death, or at the last tribunal, disturb our peace or impair our confidence ; “ *For there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.*”

For this great purpose, brethren, I continue the investigation of the text, and shall do so till we have canvassed every important item of our accounts as the stewards of God. What can we desire more than the accomplishment of such a purpose. To be made, by divine grace, perfect and holy. Always to have our lamps trimmed and burning, and we ourselves ready at any hour to meet the call of the Bridegroom, the Lord our Judge. If self-examination be important to this end, we cannot surely become weary of the subject, nor will your patience be exhausted as long as there is a sin to be repented of or a soul to be saved. As long as this shall be the case, so long will the investigation which we have instituted, be profitable for us ; and if, in the end, through the blessing

of God, one soul is made wise unto salvation, the object of the preacher will have been attained. But may we not hope that by the course proposed and thus far pursued, by calling upon ourselves to give an account of our stewardship, we all may be made wiser and more deeply impressed with the responsibility of our stations, may in every thing be improved, more animated in every duty, and more perfectly devoted in body and soul to that blessed Master, whose we are, and "who hath bought us with the price of his blood." O God, grant this in thy mercy, "Grant that we may continue thine for ever, and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until we come unto thy everlasting kingdom."

The next blessing in order which I have said we receive from God, and for the present use of which we must account to Him, is that of *property*. The example of the unjust steward seems to have been adduced, by our blessed Saviour for the special purpose of teaching us our duty with regard to this gift. Hence he subjoins immediately after the relation, "And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

This subject opens a larger field for remark than is consistent with the plan I have pre-

scribed to myself. I shall, therefore, omit many observations that might be made, leaving them to be supplied by your private reflections. That property, the bounties of Providence, the possessions which fall to our lot, are a *blessing*, it will never in this world and among men of the present race, be necessary to prove. The fact they are universally disposed to admit without evidence. And were property and possessions the greatest curse, and, indeed, where they are really made such, still they are thought to be the chief good. But that all we possess of earthly substance is a *gift of heaven*, is not so readily granted. There are men, and men professing to believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible who deny this truth. While they allow that the controlling influence of the Most High rules and presides over the destinies of his church, and over the spiritual destinies of mankind, they deny to Him a superintending providence, and refuse to admit that he has any agency in their temporal concerns. Any agency in the acquisition of wealth, or any influence upon the means by which it is lost. All this is, in their view, left to the decision of chance, or to the superior ability of contending rivals. And they suppose this to be the case, not because God is without power or right to regulate the temporal affairs of men, but because such an interference seems to them in-

consistent with his majesty and greatness. I have myself met with many of this description, who professed to credit every syllable of Scripture as eternal truth, although the disbelief of a special divine providence, is but a revised article among the absurdities of atheism, which has been a thousand times exploded.

Singular paradox. How strangely must these people read and understand the Scriptures. The Scriptures most positively affirm what they deny. The Scriptures demolish their whole hypothesis of the chances of fortune, and establish, beyond the power of contradiction, the certainty of a universally superintending providence of God. By them we are taught to pray to Him for our *daily bread*. By them we are assured that he alone "measurcth to each his basket and store," that "he only giveth to men the power to get wealth," and that his providing hand and all-seeing eye are so perpetually extended over every living thing, that "the young ravens are fed by him," that "one sparrow does not fall to the ground without him," and that "he numbers the very hairs of our heads." If God was like proud, weak man, such condescension and care might be inconsistent with his majesty and greatness; but he is not. "He is exalted far above all praise." And as nothing can be too high, so nothing is too low for his notice. The small-

est concerns are not beneath *his* attention "who inhabiteth eternity."

The same benevolence, therefore, which has wrought out redemption for our souls, which gives us the treasures of grace, supplies us with whatever earthly good falls to our share. Property is from God, and that person who ascribes its acquisition to his own wisdom, adores himself, dishonours his Maker, and is worse than a pagan. Sad and sorrowful the account of such a person.

If property of any and every description be directly from the munificence of the common Parent of mankind, then, that we are accountable to him for its use, for the manner in which we employ it, would seem to follow of course. But here again a fatal error every where prevails. The nature of the grant is mistaken, and the gift is thought to be such an absolute investiture, and the title so exclusive that the Donor deprives himself of, and loses all right to any subsequent claim. Nothing could be more fallacious than this selfish conception. If we are stewards of the bounties of heaven, we are not the absolute proprietors; we are not the *owners* of any thing we possess. The character of a steward determines the nature of the grant. The goods are his Master's and not his own, which is the invariable representation of the word of God. Whatever we have is

only *lent* to us : is committed to our care as a *trust*, with the charge of the Benefactor—“ Occupy till I come.” The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein.” “ The cattle upon a thousand hills are his.” “ The gold is mine, and the silver is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Say not that such and such things are your own. Say not, proud man, that those houses, those stores, those lands, those stocks, or those ships are your’s, but rather in honesty confess that you are only the humble steward, to whose charge they are at present committed by a superior Master, who can reclaim them at any instant he shall choose. “ What hast thou that thou didst not receive ?” Or what that thou cannot be deprived of, and made as destitute as the most forlorn beggar that is seen in our streets. By one breath of the Almighty, the whole train of evils is awakened, the elements are armed, the fire consumes, the tempest destroys, credit fails, friends betray, sickness prostrates, all the engines of desolation are put in operation at the same dreadful moment, and a voice strikes through the ears of the wretch, in the dust to which he is fallen,—“ *Give an account of thy stewardship.*”

This settles the question of our being accountable. This proves that property, worldly possessions, are not our own, but are God’s.

Now, my brethren, have you ever considered these as your own, and that you had a right to do with them as you please, regardless of the will of Him who entrusted you with them, and who is their only lawful proprietor, here is an account standing against you. And wherever this is now the case, wherever the right to property is supposed to be exclusive, and the disposition of it left to the free choice of the present possessor, the design and end of the grant are frustrated; and he who acts upon this principle, is a faithless, an unjust, and a fraudulent steward.

But the preacher never treads upon more dangerous ground than when he approaches this subject. And there is no subject, among all those contained within the circle of religious and moral discussion, where he is heard with less attention, or where the truths he promulgates and the practical precepts arising out of them, are so little likely to meet with a candid and ready reception, or even a cool and dispassionate examination; because it is here that all the worst passions of our nature are awakened, alarmed, and immediately arrayed against him. Avarice, to cover from the conscience the true cause of its disgust and fears, excites into action the green-eyed sensations of jealousy and suspicion, and he is taxed with sinister designs—with a wish of personal emo-

lument, of benefiting himself at the expense of his hearers. No matter how distant his thoughts and all that he says may be from such views, if he dwells for a moment on our duties with respect to what we possess, these and like accusations are preferred against him. Let him from the oracles of eternal truth denounce the judgments of God against the covetous and extortioners: let him from them urge the duty of benevolence and liberality: let him portray, in the liveliest and most animating colours, the loveliness, the beauty, and the blessedness of charity: let him plead the cause of the suffering orphan and widow with the earnestness and the eloquence of an inspiration fired with a coal from off the altar of heaven, it is all the same, it affects us not, it is nothing—some selfish motive must be at the bottom.

Thus are the lips of the preacher closed up: for if he opens them upon this subject it is almost always in vain. Our passions, our prejudices are invincible, and we instantly repel every suggestion of truth. The difficulty of converting those Jews, who in the face of the clearest light and the most undeniable demonstrations, in defiance of the most astonishing miracles wrought by the visible finger of God, were determined to discredit the divine mission of the Saviour, was not greater; the difficulty of removing darkness from the benighted mind

of the Hindoo, and of breaking those chains of idolatrous superstition, which, with the strength of ages bind him down to the dust, so as to make him understand, to know, and to receive the sublime truths of the Gospel, is not greater, the difficulty of impressing the steeled and veteran libertine with the higher happiness of religion and the superior motives of virtue to all the attractions of sense, is not half so great as that of inducing Christians, professing Christians, to hear, to know, to feel, and to practice the duties which God requires from them in regard to the things of this present world. I shall not, therefore, brethren, dictate to you a syllable upon this article. I shall not even presume to tell you what I conceive to be your duty, where I know that the task would be useless. I shall barely submit to your reflection one or two brief considerations and humbly suggest what *may* be right and what wrong.

If the property, the good things of the world which we possess are God's and not our own; if we are entrusted with them only as stewards, and are strictly accountable to him for their prudent and judicious use, according to the rules given us to regulate our conduct, can we employ them solely or chiefly for selfish purposes and be exonerated from the charge of perversion? If we entertain correct views concerning the nature of our trust, is it to be

supposed that we can justify ourselves to our consciences and to our God in refusing to contribute a trifling share of these things for the public good, for the support of his church, or for the relief of the poor and destitute? It is said that "charity begins at home." Whether this be true, or whether in general it is only a cloak for an uncharitable spirit—is it true that charity *stays* at home? Are not all the creatures of God equally entitled to his bounty? and if you be his steward, can you withhold that bounty and remain blameless? If you are able to reconcile it with your conscience now, may not the time arrive when this shall not be so easily done?

How will you account with God when he shall say to you upon the bed of death, or in the day of judgment—"I entrusted thee with a share of my earthly treasures for the good of others, for the good of my people, for the good of the whole human family, and yet seldom or ever has it been devoted by thee to any of these purposes. There was an object of benevolence, to which thou hast refused the smallest patronage. There again was a religious one, to which thou hast never given a penny. Here was my church, to which thy contributions have been most scanty, or never made at all. And here was a poor, suffering saint, to whom thy heart and thy hand have

been forever closed." What will you answer ! what will you say to him ! Ah ! what will you answer when he shall say to *you*—" Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

My hearers, I decide nothing—I advance no opinion of my own. I leave the subject to your own reflections. God grant us all both light and grace, for Jesus' sake.

And now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N V I

ST. LUKE XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

“ As far as in you lies,” said an apostle, “ live peaceably with all men.” And this precept deserves to be adhered to and to be practised, not only because peace is the genius of the Gospel, whose maxims all tend to promote a spirit of gentleness, courteousness, and kindness, but because it is even the dictate of worldly prudence.

There are no persons whom we can possibly desire to make our enemies. There are none whose hostility and ill-will toward us we are not sorry to occasion. Such may be our misfortune. We may create enemies in a thousand ways. We may create them from inadvertency and want of thought. We may create them by a conscientious discharge of our duty—by an uncompromising defence of the truth; and we may even make some persons our enemies by a profusion of kindnesses, because ingratitude is the shortest method of cancelling an immense debt, which might otherwise remain unpaid forever.

But from whatever cause enemies are created,

there is no person of virtuous sensibility and Christian meekness who does not deeply lament the event. He laments it, because, actuated by the spirit of the Gospel, his aim is to live peaceably with all men, and also because he knows that there is no virtue or integrity, no innocence or purity safe from the envenomed shafts of slander, hurled by an exasperated foe. Whether that foe be in a high station or a low one; whether he be great or small, rich or poor; whether he sustain the character of honesty and principle, or be infamous for his contempt of both morality and religion, still he has the power of wounding your peace. Indeed, there is not a person in the community so degraded and low, so mean and despicable, or so notoriously vile, unprincipled, and regardless of the laws, both of God and man, as to be entirely without ability, by falsehood and misrepresentation, of doing you an injury and of tarnishing your fair name in the opinion of the world. We are happy to know, that this must in some measure be proportioned to his own credit and general estimation. But yet every man has his influence. Every man has a certain class of people by whom he is esteemed, even if it be for his vices, and with whom whatever he says passes for the truth. For this reason we should never be willing to provoke without cause, the enmity of the most

unworthy, of the meanest and most contemptible. No. I would not tread under my feet a worm, so as to exasperate him against me, could I avoid doing so, knowing that even this diminutive crawling insect may possess a deadly poison. Our constant endeavour, therefore, mindful that peace is the genius of the gospel, and the great and unvarying aim of all who are guided by its precepts, must be, "as far as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men."

I have said that every man has his influence. Every man has some influence in society. If this be true of bad men, and of the most degraded and profligate among the bad, it is much more true of the good, it is much more true of every person of integrity and virtue. Of such there are none so poor and humble as to be incapable of exercising an important influence upon the minds of others. If not upon that of the community at large, yet they possess this power with their relations and connections, with their own families, and with their particular friends.

Influence is reputation. *Reputation* is among the blessings of God, for which we are accountable to him. Will this proposition be denied? All the truths which have been established, confirm it. We have seen that our life and being, our mental faculties, health,

friends, and property, are from God. These all have their weight in determining the measure of our influence, from these our reputation results.

Miserable is that man who thinks to establish a character independent of the will of his Maker. Let him dig deep for its foundation, let him rear his edifice high, with the finest materials that earthly wisdom can produce, the least blast from the Almighty shall overthrow and demolish it, and lay all his fancied glory and fair expectations level with the ground. It is "the Lord God who putteth down one and exalteth another." By Him "princes rule," and without him nothing can prosper.

Vain and presumptuous mortals have often undertaken to exalt themselves, and to build them a name and a reputation that might reach up to heaven, in defiance of the power that was above them, and as often have their plans been frustrated, and every vestige of their magnificence confounded in the dust. Their designs may sometimes seem for a while to flourish; but it is only to render their downfall more conspicuous and the destruction of their hopes more complete; and from their dark region of despair we hear the last lamentation,—“How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground! Thy pomp is brought down to the

grave. The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee." "Is this the man that made the earth to tremble? that did shake kingdoms? that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof? Thou art cast out as an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit: as a carcase trodden under feet."

The respectability of your name, the honour of your station, the credit and authority you have acquired in the world, be they greater or less, are wholly derived from God, and are altogether at his disposal. How are we to employ this blessing so as to satisfy a good conscience, and to be able always to give an acceptable account to our Judge? Every one, by using the influence of his rank, his station, his connections, his profession or occupation, to promote the cause of virtue and religion. Whatever your standing or place in society, you can do something to this end. If you have not the weight and authority of a magistrate, you may have those of a father. If you have not the influence of a public character, you may at least have that of a private companion. And so of every class of people, there are some, whose virtuous and religious improvement they possess the power of advancing. It becomes

our duty, not only for our own happiness, but on account of the good to others of which we may be instrumental, watchfully to preserve the reputation we have acquired. Never permit an imprudence to destroy your influence.

Again, the force of example is in exact proportion to the reputation we sustain. Is your reputation fair, or is that of a person above the lower or middle walks of life, your commendable example shall have a lastingly salutary effect. And on the other hand, your bad example may, from the station you fill, or from the name you have acquired, produce effects upon the community, whose pestilential operation shall be felt and lamented, even after your own dust has mingled with its native earth. These considerations urge upon us both a speedy and a critical reckoning with ourselves.

Have we always exerted our influence on the side of virtue? Have we done all in our power to this end? Have we never, by an indifference, inclined it to the opposite side of the scales? There are some vices which are so frequent and so generally prevalent, that they are passed with little notice; and many worthy people, by their disregard of them or neglect to reprove them, are thought to tolerate and to view them with complacency. We too often meet with cowards of a baser class than those who are afraid to be found in the ranks

of an army. Men who are afraid to exert the influence they possess for the suppression of popular vices, even while they are aware of their destructive tendency upon the public welfare :—men who desert the cause of the oppressed and persecuted, when the possibility of danger to themselves can be contemplated :—and men who can espouse the side which their consciences assure them to be wrong, for the sake of present convenience or profit. These are the basest kind of cowards, because they not only abandon, desert the part of religion and virtue through their timidity, love of ease, fear of loss, or desire of gain, but they add all the weight of their characters to the part of vice and immorality, to the side of our grand enemy, the Devil. Hence the words of the blessed Saviour, in condemnation of these base and dastardly souls,—“ He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” And, “ if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

I see one of these cowards in that man, who professing piety tamely submits to have his ears stung with the oaths and blasphemy of the profane and impious, without sharply reproofing them.—I see one of these cowards in that believer in Christianity, who can sit in the company of scoffers and hear the holy religion

in which he has been educated, reviled and ridiculed, or even spoken of with the slightest degree of disrespect, without giving vent to disgust and indignation.—I see another of these cowards in that person who can hear the character of a friend or of an honest man traduced and abused, and dares not, promptly and boldly to repel the vile slander.—I see a baser one still in that slanderer himself, and in all those people who for the sake of pleasing or of conversation, join in the every-day detraction of virtue and merit, and thus, by the addition of their names, give increased currency and strength to the endless round of misrepresentation and falsehood circulating in the world. And I see the basest of all these cowards in that man, who from motives of interest betrays or becomes indifferent to the cause of justice and truth, and in any way gives countenance to iniquity and sin: who through fear of incurring a trifling expense, leaves the helpless in the hands of unrelenting extortion—or for the sake of the patronage of a wealthy, passionate, unforgiving, malicious, Christless reprobate, conspires with him in the assassination and murder of innocence.

Ah! and I see another of these cowards in that professed minister of Jesus Christ, who, forgetting the example of his Divine Master, and possessing none of that spirit with which

he was actuated, is afraid to reprove sins that are popular, or such as have the countenance of authority to protect them : is afraid "to declare the whole counsel of God," and suffers many irregularities, many condemnable practices to go uncensured through fear of offending, or from a greater love of the praise of men than of God. If by his example he do not encourage the vices he is afraid to reprove, if his conduct do not express positive complacency towards them, still by his silence or his more inexcusable apology, he gives the sanction of his station in favour of the enemies of that religion, to whose ministry and service he has been solemnly consecrated. But it is commonly the case, that the force of example is added to the influence of authority. He who is afraid to denounce publicly customs or practices, which his Bible marks with reprobation, or to which, at least, it affords no colour of approval, seldom has courage to pursue a course of conduct free from the suspicion of justifying them himself secretly in his own heart.

All these cowards in virtue and morality, in piety and religion, instead of following, as they perhaps sometimes suppose, the precept of the apostle, "as far as in us lies to live peaceably with all men," do every thing to oppose it and to excite mankind to arms against each other

and against themselves. How is *he* aiming to promote the peace of society, who, by his fears, his indifference, his disregard of the principles of justice, his slanders, his sordid motives of interest, his complacency towards the vilest and most profligate traducer, or by his mutilation of truths which the sacred functions of his office require him to dispense faithfully, weakens the power of religion upon the mind, cuts asunder the bands of brotherhood which it imposes, gives loose rein to the worst passions of our nature, and by encouraging vice and depressing virtue, lights the torch of discord in every neighbourhood? These things are done under the sun. They are done by persons who in some measure sustain the reputation of Christians. The influence of that holy name becomes the instrument of all this lamentable evil. What an account, what a reckoning must ensue!

And, my brethren, have *we* no concern in these things? Have we nothing to do in this matter? Have we never been cowards in the cause of virtue and of God? Have we never thus lent the weight of our characters to the side of the enemy? Reputed Christians, who, for sins of this kind are condemned by their own consciences, are far more numerous than the whole tribe of avowed unbelievers and infidels. There was but one Judas who be-

trayed his master, but there were eleven other disciples who in the hour of danger forsook him and fled. I ask again, have we nothing to do in this matter? Have we never been guilty of any of the faults which have been named? When we look back and review our conduct, do we see no impeachment against us, and on this particular point, do we feel ready to give an account of our stewardship?

Ah! who is ready? Alas! my brethren, I know not how you may feel; what may be your thoughts or what your confidence; but as for myself, I frankly own, that I am almost afraid to look back. When I consider the purity of God, the severity of his laws, and the strict and undeviating fidelity which he requires at our hands: when I contrast all this with my own weaknesses, my timorous and faltering discharge of duty, frequent want of firmness, and a too flexible disposition to the solicitations of error, no language can express my alarm. And I think that none of us, when we reflect how often in these instances we have all given the enemies of religion occasion to blaspheme, to charge us with gross inconsistency and to claim the weight of our characters on the side of their pernicious maxims and customs, shall find much reason for calmness and quietude of mind—not one who will

not tremble to reflect that here also the account is against him.

What then are we to say of those who deliberately, designedly, and unremittingly apply all the strength of their influence to the cause of vice and irreligion? Who, having acquired some reputation in the world, employ the credit of that reputation to disguise the truth, to propagate error, to seduce the unthinking, to rob religion of its glory, to subvert its foundations, and to erect upon its ruins the temple of infidelity and atheism. What account can these men render even to the world which enters into judgment against them? The world itself demands of them an account of their stewardship, and often takes away their reputation and influence for their having abused them to impair the peace, good order, and happiness of society. Judge, then, what must be their account with Him who shall soon come "in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are told—"They shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his appearing."

What can more heighten our concern and our assiduity in a wise application of our talents than this reflection? "The Judge is at the door." "He that shall come will come and

will not tarry." He will not tarry—"He will not delay his coming, as the evil servant hath said in his heart." No ; but at that midnight hour when he is folded in the arms of forgetfulness and fancied security, and fondly flatters himself that no eye sees him and that no hand can reach him, the dreadful summons shall in a moment dispel his dream and drag him from the scene of time—"Give an account of thy stewardship."

O God, give us grace to be prepared through the merits of the blessed Saviour.

And now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N V I I .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

One of the most beautiful descriptions of virtue which was ever penned, is that of charity, by the apostle St. Paul. The excellency of this divine principle is presented in such a light as to attract the attention of the most indifferent, and to create the admiration of the most insensible and cold-hearted. Charity, the loveliest of the virtues, is made more lovely by this animating representation of its superior qualities and effects: and the sum of the whole, of all that is magnificent and great, is expressed in three words—“ Charity never faileth.” It is easier to feel than it is to communicate in language, the extent, the dimension, the length or breadth, the height or depth of the ideas which are here embraced—“ Charity never faileth.” It falls short neither in the multitude of its objects nor in the duration of the time of its operation. Universal in its effects, the period will never arrive when it shall cease to be exerted.

“ The seas shall waste, the skies in smoke decay ;
Rocks fall to dust, and mountains melt away,”

the influence of this heavenly virtue shall last forever, nor terminate while beings and intelligences exist. Charity being divine and eternal, is in man the reflection of the glorious attributes of Deity. It is the reflection of Divine goodness, benevolence, and love; and that which is true of this principle as a whole, is so of its several parts. They are all images of the perfections of Jehovah. They all, in man, become a reflection of the divine attributes.

The continual privilege of exercising these virtues is among the blessings which an indulgent heavenly Father grants to us all. I have embraced the subject under the general terms of "opportunities of benevolence." Opportunities of benevolence are the privilege allowed us by Heaven of exercising the virtues of charity in all its various channels of operation. And do we consider, brethren, how great is this privilege? It is indeed impossible for us to estimate it too highly. It is impossible for us to estimate it as we ought to do. Not till mortality has put on immortality shall we be able to comprehend, fully, its exalted nature—the extent of the honour and high distinction to which we are called.

It is the privilege of being like God—of being perfect as he is perfect, and holy as he is holy. That infinitely glorious and eternal

Being, whom the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain : that Being who dwells in light far beyond the reach of mortal ken, "whom no man hath seen or can approach unto," and before whose throne angels bow, arch-angels cast their crowns, and seraphs veil their faces, condescends, permits, grants to us, the crawling insects upon an inconsiderable spot in his creation, to shine in the lustre and brilliancy of his own glory. For to reflect the image of God, to reflect the brightness of his attributes, is to shine in a lustre and brilliancy borrowed from the glory of his throne.

This is the high privilege allowed to us. We are permitted to imitate the perfections and attributes of this Great Being. We are required to do so : we are required to show forth in our lives his goodness, mercy, and love : and this by the opportunities of benevolence with which we are blessed. Is not such a blessing one of the greatest possible favours that could be bestowed upon us in the present state ? If real honour and true glory have any influence upon our minds, if our ideas have the least expansion, or if our views are elevated an inch above our heads, we cannot fail to contemplate it with exulting thoughts.

But we are to remember that here also an account will be required. For this blessing likewise God may say to us at any time, and

he shall one day say to every man who has ever lived. "Give an account of thy stewardship:" give an account of the opportunities of benevolence with which I have blessed thee. And most justly will the magnitude of the favour increase the severity of this account. It is here that unfaithful stewards shall find the least apology for their neglect of duty. It is here that there shall be the least possible chance for the admission of excuse, because it is here that the obligations of their office are the least ambiguous or obscure. Besides, the force of the parable from which the text is taken, seems to be directed chiefly to this one point—to show men their duty with regard to the means of benevolence. By a faithful employment of these means, we are required "to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." By a generous use of whatever is committed to us, we are required to render ourselves worthy of inheriting "the true riches," the treasures of immortal felicity. The unjust steward was condemned and deprived of his office—not for his liberality, not for his having employed his master's goods in acts of benevolence, but because he had not done so—because he had *wasted* them—had employed them to no useful purpose agreeably to the intent of his trust, but had squandered them to selfish and iniquitous ends, and thus had defrauded his master

both of his goods and of the object for which they were committed to his charge.

Is this our own account? Ye stewards of God, is this the only account ye can give of the opportunities of benevolence with which ye have been blessed? In this particular case it will at once appear that every person is a steward richly invested. Opportunities of benevolence are afforded to all, and hence upon all, the privilege is conferred of shining in the image of the immortal God. Of what punishment shall he be thought worthy who has despised this privilege, and thus, with sacrilege and blasphemy, trampled under his feet this image of all that is glorious and holy? Thunders of heaven! why have ye been so long withheld from breaking upon our heads?

Opportunities of benevolence are afforded to all. *Opportunity*, in the sense in which the term is now used, implies *ability* and *occasion*. By ability I mean the faculty or power of doing a benevolent act, and by occasion, objects presented to us in need and worthy of such acts. Take this explication, brethren, and see if your own experience does not bear witness to the truth of what has been stated. Have not all the faculty and power of performing, in some way or other, acts of benevolence? And are there any, to whom objects in need and worthy of such acts, are not every day presented?

If not, then opportunities of benevolence are afforded to all.

In speaking of the ability of being benevolent, no direct reference to property, to wealth or riches, is intended, for upon that subject I have already remarked. Besides these, there are many, very many other means of being benevolent with which we are blessed. In many other ways the ability, the faculty and power of doing benevolent acts may exist. Here, then, look to your account, and think not that the fortunate of this world are the only persons who occupy responsible stations, or the only persons who have the means of administering to the wants of the needy, and, therefore, that from them alone an account on this article will be required.

You may not possess a profusion of this world's goods, but you may abundantly possess that which is much better, that by which you can be of much greater benefit to society, that by which you have the faculty of doing far greater and more lasting acts of benevolence. You may be entirely destitute of corruptible treasure, and, indeed, in this respect may require the charity of others, but yet you are not destitute of mind and understanding, you are not destitute of feeling and sensibility, you are not destitute of hands or feet, of tongue, or of eyes and ears. All these may be the instruments of

benevolence ; and for our having devoted them to this end we must render an account. If we have not done so, we stand impeached by our own consciences.

The worthy subjects needing acts of benevolence are too numerous and too universally distributed among us to admit a doubt upon the question, whether they do not address themselves to the charity of all, and whether all are not thus blessed with opportunities of benevolence. He who has never met with subjects of this kind, he who does not meet with them every day of his life, is a stranger among men. They are every where, and are so disposed by God. The great Lord of the house having appointed his stewards, having supplied them with the means, so arranges his family, as always to give to those stewards, the most easy opportunity of administering to the necessities of that family. Many and diversified are these necessities, nor less so than the means of relieving them. But whether they be temporal or spiritual, to enumerate them will not be important, since your own thoughts, brethren, must readily supply the omission.

Let us reckon with our consciences upon this head. You have not had the means of bestowing abundance upon the necessitous, but you have had the faculty of deciding upon the merits of their cause. You could have inquired

into, have known and understood the nature of their wants, and by doing this could have been instrumental in procuring them relief. You have not had the power to heal the incurable distresses of the wretched, but you have had the power to feel for their misery ; you have had the power to sympathize with those distresses. You have not had the pecuniary ability of contributing largely to the interests of the Christian church, perhaps you have even been compelled to say, like Peter, “ silver and gold have I none,”—but have you, like him, *given of such things as you had*. You have had the ability of zeal, time, and attention, which you might have contributed to the interests of the Christian church. You have had the ability of saying, with St. Paul, “ These hands have administered to the necessities of the needy.”

You may not have had the power of defending effectually the cause of the oppressed and persecuted, of breaking the iron grasp of the extortioner, or of relieving the numberless miseries which you see around you ; but you have always had the power of listening to the complaints of the sufferer. And the kind *hearing* of the histories of the unfortunate, as indicating a benevolent disposition of mind, affords them, when we have nothing else to bestow,

some comfort; while the refusal of even this cannot fail to increase their cup of affliction.

You have not had the power of changing, by a word, as your Saviour did, bodily or mental suffering to joy and peace: but you have had the power to search it out, to look after "the weary and heavy laden," and to plead the case of the suffering with those possessed of more efficient means of consolation and relief than yourself. You have at least had the power of praying for all such. You may not have had the faculty of rendering yourself, by your benevolent deeds, conspicuous to the world at large: you have not had the learning of a Gamaliel, the eloquence of Isaias, or the wisdom and riches of a Solomon: but you have had the faculty of doing something for the encouragement of religion and virtue, and something towards the suppression of vice. You have had the faculty, if you were disposed to exercise it, of giving comfort and counsel to the troubled conscience, and of disturbing the false security of the inpenitent, stumbling in guilt and ignorance.

Again, you may not have had the power of preventing the injurious insinuations of the malicious, but you have had the power of repelling them. You have had the power in a thousand instances, of advancing by a single remark the interest and prosperity of an indi-

vidual, whom, at the same time, one unfriendly word might have ruined. When there is nothing else left, there is always the ability of a kind opinion,—the ability of thinking kindly and of speaking kindly. So, in various ways almost without number, are opportunities of benevolence continually presented for our attention and exercise.

Have we worthily improved all these opportunities? This inquiry reduces our account to a crisis. Have we always been instrumental in procuring relief for the poor and destitute when it was in our power to do so? Have we always felt for, and sympathized with the wretched in their distress? Has the church of God ever received from us as much as the widow's mite, either in attention, time, or zeal, which are of more value than thousands of gold and silver? Have our hands truly ministered to the necessities of the needy? Have we always, indeed, heard with patience and with concern the complaints of suffering innocence, and the mournful histories of the unfortunate; and have we never endeavoured to avoid and to close our ears against the recitation of their calamities, and like the priest and levite, in the Saviour's parable, "passed by on the other side?" Have we done any thing, worthy to be remembered, for the cause of humanity? Have we ever entered the miser-

able hovels of the forlorn and dying, and, when we could do nothing more for them, commended them by our prayers to the hands of the Father of mercies? Have we always endeavoured to comfort the mourning penitent, warned the wicked of their approaching ruin, been afflicted with those in mental distress, and thus, "wept with them that did weep?" If there is true benevolence, this is a part of it.

Again, have we always repelled unjust and injurious insinuations against the character of integrity and virtue, whenever we have heard them? Have we never made such ourselves? Instead of it, have we always given the most favourable representation of others that we consistently and honestly could do, and whenever, by this means, we were able to advance their interests, have we done it? In one word, have we been to our brethren, our kindred, our acquaintances, and our rare, *neighbors*?

This is the office of a benevolent and good steward. But it is possible, very possible that when we investigate the instances which have just been cited, and recollect our own conduct as they occurred, we may find that in many and even all of them we have come short of our duty, have committed many undeniable and glaring faults. Here, then, too, the account is equitable. We stand convicted by our own consciences. And while we are thus

convicted, while our hearts condemn us, "God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things." Alas! how can we give to him an account of our stewardship. Let us endeavour to amend and to do better for the future : and hereafter let a knowledge of defects be a double incitement to greater benevolence in all relations, connections, and transactions with each other and with mankind in general—a double incitement to the excelling in every good word and work. And let those who disregard both the principles and the opportunities of benevolence, and who, unmindful of an account to be rendered, sport with the feelings and happiness of their fellow-beings, know and be assured that "They who have showed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy."

To the Father, &c.

S E R M O N V I I I .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

1 “ *Give an account of thy stewardship.* ”

In my last discourse opportunities of benevolence were the subject of investigation. That for these opportunities we are accountable to God, as *his* stewards, it is hoped we are all well persuaded. Such a persuasion must supply a sufficient motive for their highest and most faithful improvement as long as we continue in our probationary state. For, can you be at any time sensible that an opportunity of doing good to others is presented to you, and that you will assuredly be hereafter punished if you forego such opportunity, and yet refuse to embrace it ? No ; it is impossible. As long then as a deep persuasion of our being accountable remains fixed and settled in the mind, we are supplied with an all-sufficient motive to unwearied and habitual acts of benevolence. We shall be benevolent in our feelings, benevolent in our words, benevolent in all our transactions and dealings with our fellow-men. We shall do good, and be always “ ready to communicate,” as far as God gives us ability, “ laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come.”

But it has been said that by the embracing of these opportunities, by the practice of the benevolent virtues, we reflect the image and the attributes of God. That here he permits us, grovelling insects as we are, to shine with a lustre and brilliancy borrowed from the fountain of his own ineffable glory. Your own observation, my brethren, your own knowledge of real excellency and of the blessed effects of Christianity among mankind, will verify the truth of this assertion.

What more interesting character do we know of in the world than the man of pure benevolence? the Christian man, whose hands are always open and whose heart is always warm? whose passions and intellectual powers and whose words and deeds are all directed in a train that shall not only avoid the least possible injury to others, but shall, on every occasion, promote their greatest good—the Christian whose study and aim, not at some particular crisis, but at all times and in all places are the welfare, the prosperity, and happiness of his fellow beings—who never sees or hears of distress without feeling it himself, and who is so sensitive upon subjects of this kind as to be doubly disquieted himself when he has caused the most trifling disquietude to others? What character commands so universal admiration as this? What other do we consider to be so

much more than human? so truly divine? It is the benevolent Christian, the Christian philanthropist who is most meritedly designated as a *godly*, as a *godlike* man.

The Bible and history are full with examples illustrating this remark, showing that universal benevolence never fails to exalt mortal, earthly beings to an eminence next in order to that of celestial. We pass in silent veneration the example of Him whom "never man spake like;" whose mercy and love language cannot describe; whose benevolence never did and never can have a parallel, because it was the benevolence of God and not of man. It was Divinity itself. But what saint, what worthy shall we find recorded for our imitation, in whose character this virtue was not the most distinguishing trait? Why was Moses more eminent than any other prophet among the Jews? Why was he allowed a closer communion with God; permitted to speak with him, face to face upon the holy mount, as a man with his friend? It was because he was more godlike than any other prophet. His whole soul was the purest essence of benevolence, and so absolutely disinterested and devoted to the good of his nation, that he could pray that God would blot *his* name from the book of life rather than that they should be exterminated. His very nature, therefore, drew him to a higher

and more intimate connection with God than any other man, and distinguished him as the greatest of prophets.

What again gave St. Paul such an undisputed pre-eminence above the other apostles and above every Christian preacher who has ever lived? which transported him in an ecstasy to the third heaven, and opened his ears to the ineffable language of Paradise? "Was it this indescribable translation, this extraordinary ecstasy itself? Was it his abundant inspirations and more frequent visions? No; it was none of these. He returns from this ecstasy to the earth, and declares,"*—"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not charity I am nothing." It was *this virtue* which gave him his pre-eminence. It was his unbounded philanthropy. It was because he "laboured more abundantly than they all." Because his benevolence to mankind became an absorbing, overwhelming principle, into which his whole body and mind were wrapt, so that with emotions not unlike those of Moses he exclaims—"I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kins-

* Saurin.

folks after the flesh." This has given him a name in the world more durable than the world itself. The same virtue has perpetuated the memory of thousands; and when oblivious shades are drawn around the remembrance of the proud conqueror, their fame shall be illustrious in the immortal mansion of the just.

But it is not great names, great learning, or great talents alone which are called to the practise of this virtue. It is not persons of this description alone, who are favoured with the opportunity of cultivating it to that eminent degree which assimilates their nature with the nature of God, draws them into the most intimate union with him, and reflects his glorious perfections. As I have before shown, every day and every hour of our lives, the same opportunity is afforded to us all. Every day and every hour are we required to exercise the same virtue: and though the same great deeds which martyrs have performed are not presented for our achievement, yet by cultivating the same enlarged disposition and unlimited benevolence of soul, may our minds become assimilated with that of the Eternal, admitted to the blessedness of an unspeakable union, and the honour of exhibiting a character that is *godlike*.

But while we are delighted in the contemplation of this subject, the excellence of a

benevolent heart, and the blessed fruits of a life of benevolence, and are delighted in anticipating better things for ourselves in future than those past ones of which we take a retrospect, a voice seems to be whispering already in our ears, "Give an account of thy stewardship." All the charms of the most angelic virtue have an insufficient attractive, and can never influence effectually the blinded and self-deceived. Without the most scrutinizing self-examination, year after year, we may hear, contemplate and admire, but shall never become better either in our hearts or in our lives. This investigation of accounts with ourselves, therefore, this reckoning with our consciences must not be suspended. It is necessary that we should again and again be admonished, that the text "Give an account of thy stewardship," should again and again be repeated.

The next subject in this account, and the one which may embrace the text, and the very sermons which are now being delivered from it, is, *the sources of religious instruction* with which God in his mercy has blessed us. If there is indeed a God; if he is our Creator, if he has endowed us with immortal souls, and made us accountable creatures, accountable to him for our actions done on earth, and if religion is the essential and indispensable qualification of every being fitted for a judg-

ment to come, then this blessing, these advantages, these means of instruction, are of momentous importance. They are the very *commission* of the steward; the defining and explanation of the power and duties of his office. Without an early attention to these it is, therefore, impossible for us to discharge the duties of our several stations acceptably to God, or satisfactorily to our own consciences. Our account will be a bad one, in whatever light it is viewed. And yet no apology can be offered, because our neglect of the means of knowledge must be a wilful neglect.

Never were any people more highly favoured than we are. Never, in any land, or at any time, were the sources of religious instruction more general or more abundant than with us. In every house there is a Bible, and in almost every street a Church.—Every christian is a teacher and every worshipping congregation a School.—Education is more easily obtained than bread, and religious knowledge as freely as water.—No one disposed to learn can want the opportunity.—Compare our condition in this respect with that of all the generations who have gone before us.—Compare it with that of many pagan nations at the present day, and even with that of many other nations called christian.—Compare *your* condition, you, who have been blessed with devout and godly

parents, and have always lived within the shadow of the sanctuary with that of thousands whom you yourselves have seen and known, and then reflect how much cause you have to thank God for his higher favours in opening to you so many sources of religious instruction which have been closed to others. These are all so many means of salvation: so many means of making your calling and election sure, and of escaping that wrath which shall be revealed against all ungodliness. They are so many means of enabling you to improve your talents with wisdom, and to be prepared to render to your Judge a satisfactory account at the last.

But do you find upon examination that you have always estimated them in this light: always placed this high value upon them, and with these views applied your heart and mind diligently to their use? Have you never been wearied, impatient, and even vexed, with the lessons of parents, and of those whose age, superior wisdom, and experience, gave them a right to instruct you? Have you not sometimes turned a deaf ear to all their admonitions, and forgotten their most salutary counsels the moment they were given? Moral and religious instruction, when we are not disposed to apply it to practice, is always irksome; and it may be feared, that there is not one present who, in

viewing a life of very few years, will not find something of this kind with which he is self-reproached. Here then the account is against us.

But upon the article now under examination, I intend to confine my remarks to the instruction of the Sanctuary, and while these might open too wide a field for the limited patience of a congregation, I will further restrict them to the subjects of attendance on divine service, and the manner of hearing sermons.

Here, my brethren, agreeably to the notice given at the commencement of these discourses, I shall speak plainly, and with no reserve ; and let my observations apply where they may, and censure whom they may, no offence will be taken, unless, alas, you are disposed to turn these observations also into another item against you in the last great account.

The formation of religious assemblies, the institution of public worship, social prayer and praise, and public reading of the Holy Scriptures, is the express ordination of Heaven, and designed by God to be the great source whence instruction to mankind in all things relating to their everlasting peace, should flow. The importance of an institution, embracing and answering such a design, may be conceived by the slightest glance at the evils that would result from abolishing it. Take away this in-

stitution, demolish our churches, disperse our religious assemblies, dispense with the sacraments, and abrogate the order of the ministry, and, in a single generation, you shall have banished the christian religion from the face of the earth. Such a state of things cannot exist, because the christian church is founded upon that eternal rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail: and if, by the neglect and unfaithfulness of its members, it fall to ruins in one place it shall, through the resistless energy of Divine grace, rise with new splendour in another.

But the promise of Christ, establishing the durability of his Church, is not to be accomplished without the agency of his disciples. The darkness of ignorance will not be dispelled, nor the light of truth disseminated, without their co-operation. And every refusal on their part, every neglect to use and to improve by the sources of religious instruction which he has appointed, is a retrenching of the knowledge of the Gospel, and the adding of something, be it ever so small, to that weight of corruption whose tendency and constant inclination are, to sink us again to the bottom of the same abyss of wretchedness and despair into which mankind were fallen before the coming of the Saviour.

What shall we say then? Every unnecessary absence from the house of God on Sun-

day, either at morning or evening, is not only a neglect to improve by the means of religious instruction with which God has blessed us, but it is doing something towards abolishing the institution of public worship itself, something to encourage the machinations of Satan against the church of the living God, something towards reducing the world again to that state of ignorance and gross darkness in which it was once involved. Reflect. I pray you, upon the amount with which you have to tax yourselves on this score. Reflect what a catalogue of dates, (were they all drawn out in form,) of days and half days, even during a single year, must appear at the final reckoning against many, alas, too many. God grant that they may so adjust this account with their consciences, as to make up for the future their delinquencies for the past.

But again, let me beg your candid and most serious attention for one moment to the subject of hearing sermons. Preaching is either a mere farce, a pastime which we may attend upon or not, as we choose, just as we go to some public exhibition during the week, or else it is a matter of the most sacred and solemn importance. And no one who believes that he has a soul to save, believes that Jesus Christ died to save that soul, and that with all the sanctities of heaven he has commissioned and

sent his ministers to teach, to instruct, and to preach his salvation to our guilty race as long as time shall endure. can view it in any other light. Here then, a source of religious instruction, with the attending authority of the immaculate Redeemer, and confirmed by the fearful consideration, of death and a judgment to come, is ordained by the eternal God. Stewards of the mysteries of the cross, tremble for your accountability in rightly dispensing the word of everlasting life ; and ye people, for whose sins the Saviour's blood was shed, *take heed how ye hear.*

To do our duty, and faithfully to improve this privilege, it is requisite that we listen and attend with diligence to the doctrine of every sermon we hear. But how often has the preacher to complain of a listless indifference and inattention. How often has it been the case that a sermon went through our ears like the sound of a striking clock, remembered scarcely to the close of its utterance ? How often have we gone away from the house of God, only to find fault with some peculiarity of the preacher ? How often have we become dull and indifferent, because the preacher was not as animated as we could have wished, even while we were forced in conscience to admit that the truths which he told us were of the last importance ? Again, how many times

have we pleased ourselves with the manner, the voice, and the language of a preacher, without paying regard enough to the substance of his discourse to remember one idea advanced by him after having retired to our houses? On the other hand, how often has the *manner* been the only objection, and yet an insuperable one to our listening with attention?

We all acknowledge that such is more or less our infirmity and that it is entirely wrong. It stands then in the account against us. But we none of us make this as serious a matter as it really is. We place it to the account of infirmity when it is in fact a guilty sin. Every lawful minister who preaches the word of God in simplicity and truth, speaks in God's stead. It is the voice of God which addresses us, whether it be in the slow and stammering accents of Moses, the "contemptible speech" of Paul, or the flowing eloquence of Apollos. From this consideration, brethren, I submit to your judgment, what must be the nature of our obligation to hear, to mark, to learn, and to improve. And how aggravated may be the account against us for esteeming lightly, and improving but poorly by this special means of grace.

Ah, may not this fearful account have been already registered against us in the books of Heaven. Consider well, my brethren, upon the

solemn import of these suggestions. “*Take heed how ye hear.*” If you have not done so, for the mercies of Christ now repent and now reform. “*He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*”

And now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N I X .

ST. LUKE XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

Much and important is the instruction to be derived from the precept or command of our blessed Saviour to Peter, “ *Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep.*” It admonishes the minister of a congregation with what care and tenderness, with what anxiety and concern he is required to discharge the duties of his station. It teaches him that he is to take the oversight of his flock with the deep interest of a shepherd to whom the objects of his trust are as dear as his life. The duties of a minister of the Lord are constantly illustrated in the holy scripture by the example of a shepherd. And the similarity of their conditions is so apparent and striking, that the name of the one is made the distinctive appellation of the other. Thus, *pastor*, while it is the most honourable, is also the most appropriate title by which the minister of a christian congregation is called.

But if this title attaches importance and dignity to his character, it reminds him at every hour of his life, and at every turn in his inter-

course with his people, of immense labours to be performed, of unsparing vigilance and solicitude to be exercised, of unabated love and affection to be cherished towards all, of unceasing prayer and unfeigned humility to be ever occupying his mind, and it reproaches him in the severest terms, it covers him with confusion and shame, and becomes a mantle of eternal disgrace and dishonour, if he is unmindful and regardless of these momentous duties.

Again, the character and office of a minister of Christ are made one with the character and office of a steward. Here also while dignity and importance are attached, the unequalled weight of his responsibility, the unspeakable magnitude of his trust are continually before him. He sees that the mysteries of redemption, the treasures which were laid up and hidden from the foundation of the world, but revealed in Jesus Christ, are committed to his charge; and is he unfaithful and remiss, does he by his negligence and love of the present world betray this trust, and become insensible to the value of this charge, the crime of his perfidy is written in awful characters upon the walls of the sanctuary, in the books of Heaven, in the calamities and afflictions of his congregation, and upon his own guilty forehead, and the call of his God, "give an account of thy

stewardship" shall be annihilating thunder in his ears.

But it is from the nature of his office as a steward that the faithful pastor sees and feels most fully the alarming consideration of his accountability, and derives from it the most urgent motives to unremitting activity, diligence, and zeal. We have been apprized, however, that the ministers of Christ are not the only stewards "to whom much has been given, and from whom much will be required." That in instances past numbering, all other classes of people are the stewards of God, and must account to him for the manner in which they employ his gifts and blessings. Nor are the ministers of Christ the only persons to receive instruction from the precept or command of the blessed Saviour to Peter, "*Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep.*" Others may receive from it a salutary lesson to direct them in many of the duties which Providence has assigned them. And lest we should expect too much from those spiritual stewards whom God has placed in his church, and to whom he has committed the dispensation of his Gospel, we are forewarned by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "that we have this treasure in *earthen vessels.*" That all those who are called to this important station, are subject to the same frailties and infirmities as the rest of their fellow-

mortals. Far too many are apt to be insensible of this truth, and to expect from the christian ministry a sinless perfection. Looking only at the sacredness of their office, and the dignity of the place which they hold as the ambassadors of God, they forget that ministers are but men; men of like passions with themselves. In justice, the same allowances, and no more, are to be made for *their* imperfections as for the imperfections of other christians.— You are not from them to look for the pure and spotless holiness of angelic and celestial beings, entirely exempt from the corruptions of human nature, nor are you to tolerate in them the carelessness, inconsideration, or levity of men of the world.

I have made these remarks, because the next subject to be embraced in this series of discourses upon our account with our consciences and our God, has reference to one of the most essential qualifications of the christian minister, and for which it becomes him, above all others, to be prepared to give an account of his stewardship. It is that of *our ability to instruct and improve others*. Would to God there were none, either of the clergy or of the laity, who buried this talent in the earth.

The ability to instruct and improve others, depends both on natural gifts, and on our own opportunities of improvement. If in neither of

these we have been favoured by Providence. no account, in this particular instance, will be exacted from us. But—there are few, who have not some natural talents, which may be usefully employed to the purposes in question. And, if any such have neglected to add to them, if they have suffered opportunities of cultivating their own minds, and fitting them for superior usefulness, to pass away without improvement, they are no less accountable. but are culpable and guilty in each respect. both for neglecting the means of improving themselves, and also for being destitute of the ability to improve others. You, my hearer, may belong to the class of whom we are speaking. You trifled away the golden opportunities of youth; neglected improvement when it was in your power, and now, are wholly incapable of instructing or improving others; and in both these cases the account is against you. Your incapacity is no excuse. “*He that keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, is guilty of all.*” But as there are few, who have not some natural talents which may be usefully employed, for the improvement of other persons, so there are few who have not acquired ones that may subserve the same purpose. It is presumed, that none in the present congregation will plead exemption from being accountable on this score.

Waiving this, however, for the moment, let us begin the investigation with the office, which, in the providence of God, I myself sustain, since it has been said, that ability to instruct and improve others is an essential qualification of the christian minister. Here, my brethren, I may, very likely, be furnishing you with weapons against myself, and against many more of our clergy, but for this reason I shall spare neither them nor myself. To a higher tribunal we must give an account of our stewardship; and there, the decisions of fallible mortals here below, will have no influence in condemning or acquitting us. "Let a man so account of us," says an Apostle, "as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment. Yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself. Yet am I not herein justified."

The approval or the condemnation of a world, shall not affect in the least the tenor of our final account. God grant, that we may so adjust it with our consciences now, as to be justified at the last. But, ah, there is room for little confidence, and many fears. The duty of a preacher of the Gospel is simple and plain; but is it as plain, that this duty is always

faithfully discharged? In order to this, he must thoroughly understand all the doctrines which he attempts, or which he is required by his office to inculcate. He must, therefore, study with industry; must read, and meditate, and pray, day and night; and to suppose that indolence and inapplication are to be rewarded with special divine inspirations, is a most daring insult upon the wisdom of heaven. He who preaches under this supposition, is guilty of the highest profanity. And what if he is ignorant of the subjects which he undertakes to unfold? what if he is ignorant of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel? and what if this ignorance is solely imputable to his idleness, to his love of ease, or of pleasure? The christian ministry, the christian religion is disgraced, infinite mischief, perhaps, is occasioned, and with the greatest justice the sentence might at once be passed upon a preacher of this description, "Thou mayest be no longer steward." For instead of instructing and improving others, he is in fact, blinding their eyes and corrupting their hearts, in the mazes and by the influence of delusion and error.

The doctrines of the gospel, which are at the foundation of all true religion, and all acceptable morality and virtue, are atonement and salvation through the Cross of Christ

alone, originating in the infinite and eternal purity and holiness of the Supreme Being: the corruption of man by nature, and the necessity of an entire change, regeneration, and renovation of his whole heart, mind, and affections, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, before the hope of justification in the sight of God, and of life and blessedness beyond the grave, can be given him. Now, the preacher who is ignorant of these three great truths of Heaven, *the atonement of the cross, the corruption of nature, and the necessity of spiritual regeneration*, or ignorant in any of their important bearings, can render his sermons of no more utility to a congregation of sinners, than the crude dissertations of Plato or Seneca would be. Other great doctrines of the Gospel I omit to mention, because their connection with these is so obvious and so unavoidable, that we never find the person, who embraces the one and rejects the other. But *he* is in danger of rejecting every great doctrine of the gospel, who is ignorant of one of its fundamental articles. He who does not know, *that there is no other name, under heaven, whereby we must be saved, but that of Jesus Christ crucified*, may preach any thing else but the truth. The merit of our own works, and a thousand worse reveries, if possible, than this. Such a preacher understands nothing of the

necessity or the efficacy of faith, and of course cannot inculcate them. He will, therefore, direct his people into any other path, rather than that narrow one which leads to Heaven.

Again, who ever saw the necessity of the atonement of Christ without having been made to feel the burden of corruption by nature? who ever laid the foundation of repentance and conversion at the heart, without being deeply sensible of its original depravity? And who ever inculcated a pure morality, evangelical piety and virtue, without beginning with the renewal and sanctification of the mind and spirit. The ignorance of which we have spoken, may be the origin of evils without number: and a love of applause, a fear of offending, and an indifference about the eternal interests of sinners, or an unholy temper, and disposition of mind in the preacher, failing to feel the responsible nature of his office, produce the same effects. Let such unworthy individuals give an account of their stewardship.

Seldom, by the disordered intellects, now alluded to, are any important truths of the Gospel preached with earnestness. Faith is never held up as the all essential requisite and great distinguishing virtue of the sanctified. Neither conversion, repentance, a new heart, nor even reformation and obedience are urged with any of that vehemence which becomes a

dying preacher to a dying people. Ah! perhaps all these are kept entirely out of sight. Perhaps, as was the case with the monks* in China, the cross of Christ, on account of its ignominy, is denied; and many of the doctrines connected with it disguised, because they are not popular. *Improvement*, the only point insisted upon—mankind, considered on the whole, to be a set of harmless creatures—some sins to be tolerated because they are so *common*, and others because we are so naturally, through infirmity, inclined to commit them.

I will here pause, wishing that this picture had no corresponding reality. But alas, brethren, we may too many of us have seen and heard preachers not unlike those who have now been delineated. Upon the nature of their account as the stewards of God, for the manner of employing their ability to instruct and improve the people of their charge, it is needless to pronounce.

But again, no minister of Christ ought to confine his instructions to the pulpit, but as far as opportunity offers, and prudence admits, to teach from house to house. Much more in this way, may often be done towards promoting religion, and improvement in every virtue, than in any other. One word sometimes, has

* Jesuit missionaries.

more effect than a whole sermon. And here I confess with sorrow and fear, that too many of us are deficient. The account is against us; "we have left undone, those things which we ought to have done."

After this acknowledgment, my dear brethren, let me add the request, that whenever I shall hereafter in my parochial visits introduce the subject of religion, you will not be dissatisfied, you will not evade, or attempt to change it to something of minor importance, and that whenever hereafter, notice of the time of catechising is given from the desk, your children may more generally attend upon it, than has sometimes been the case.

Lastly, we remark, that the *example* of a christian minister is every thing, in his ability to instruct and improve others. If bad, no learning, no eloquence, no industry, can give him the influence which he ought to possess, and which is indispensable to his usefulness. But if, on the other hand, it is good, if his walk and conversation adorn his profession, they make up for a thousand less defects, and let his capacity and talents be what they may, he cannot fail of doing some good to others. On this subject then, we ought daily to reckon with our consciences, and to pray for the searching and guiding spirit of the Almighty.

But, my brethren, you will not be content.

that I should employ the whole of this discourse in a lecture to myself. It would be arrogance in me, and likewise an act of injustice to you, as you possess equal ability to instruct and improve others. To you also, is a dispensation of the Gospel committed, and you also are required, to preach its holy and eternal truths. Every parent is in some sense, the priest of his family. Every christian is an evangelist to all those around him, who stand in need of instruction. Each day of your lives are you to preach the word, by your pious conversation and godly example; and by every means in your power, to endeavour to enlighten the minds, and improve the hearts, of all within the sphere of your influence. Such is the duty of us all. But have we always done this? Ah, is there one individual among us, who can aver that his conscience is clear, and that he has never been guilty of many neglects with regard to this duty? If not, the account is still against us.

But there are some who may ask, where the opportunities for this use of our talents are to be found? We admit that we have *ability* to instruct and improve others, in certain circumstances, and were we among people under the influence of Pagan darkness and superstition, there would be a field for labour, but in a country like our own, we can see little or no

occasion for it. Do you not then see multitudes under the dominion of passions, by which their minds are as much blinded to the light of the truth as they would be by the grossest superstition of Pagan idolatry? These will give full employ to all your philanthropy. Some who need instruction, some who need improvement, meet you at every turn. If, however, you are not satisfied with this information, I refer you to the superintendents of our Sunday schools. They will point out to you abundant opportunity of exerting all your ability to the best advantage. They will provide you with the means of cancelling a thousand debts which you owe to society, and of laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, so that when your great Master and Lord shall call you to give an account of your stewardship—to give an account of the manner in which you have employed your ability to instruct and improve others, you shall do it with joy and not with grief.

The untiring labours of a faithful Sunday school teacher are above all praise. There is no computing the extent of the benefit which is done by them to the community at large. I do not say this for the gratification of teachers who may be present, but I say it with the hope of persuading many others to engage in the same blessed work. Is it possible to conceive

of one more benevolent, one more lasting in its effects! The monuments of it shall endure forever—not indeed sculptured in marble and brass, but in the hearts of the latest posterity who people this earth. And with the conflagration of the world, and the destruction of all things human, they shall not perish. The memorial of them shall come up before God along with the precious souls, saved by this unequalled charity from the lowest deep of perdition, and the instruments of salvation to these souls, shall be had in everlasting remembrance in Heaven, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.

O, then, go thou and do likewise.

And now to Father, Son and Holy Ghost
&c

S E R M O N X .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

" Give an account of thy stewardship."

What, my brethren, can be more affecting, than the consideration, that while we are in this church, adjusting our spiritual accounts, and in the midst of the subject, before we have been able to bring these accounts to a close, the time of probation with some of us may be ended, and the summons addressed to us, to give an account of our stewardship, at the tribunal of Heaven? If there is one reflection, which urges me more irresistibly than any other, to pursue this subject with diligence, and to omit nothing that may be of moment, but to carry it through, to the conclusion proposed, on its commencement, it is this. And if there is no other that will support your patience, and secure your strict and unwearied attention, surely, the consideration of the precarious and uncertain tenure of our existence in the present world, and that the days allotted us for the trial of our faith, and to be prepared for our last great reckoning, may be finished and gone, during the time that we are investigating the subject, must have the effect of doing so.

What if the mournful event, which we can anticipate should be realized. What if some of you, during the weeks in which I am endeavouring to interest your attention, with matter suggested by this text, should hear its call addressed to you personally, not by the admonition of the preacher, but by the summons of death, "Give an account of thy stewardship :"—this year, this month, this week, this hour, "thou shalt die." Where would you then, and occupied with what subjects, choose to be found. Ah, how much rather would you prefer, that this summons should find you deeply engaged in meditating upon your accountableness, and your improvement of the blessings of providence and grace, than in the tumult of the world, in the amusement of company, or even in the pleasing of your fancies, without benefitting your hearts, by something new and sparkling in the preacher. This is neither more nor less, than to choose to be found in well doing, rather than in a state of forgetfulness of duty. To choose to be found as the stewards of God, in the faithful discharge of the trust committed to us, rather than in betraying it, and in contemptuously disregarding *his* will, who has exacted our diligence.

A time of probation is among the most precious gifts with which we are blessed. It is the period assigned to us for the improve-

ment of our talents, for the conscientious and due performance of the duties of our stewardship; the period for "making our calling and election sure." If you hear, if you regard, if you attend to any thing more of a sermon than the text, this subject must interest you. That sun which rose so bright upon you this morning, may to-morrow set upon your grave. For every day it has shined, an account must be given, and how soon, God only knows. Put then yourselves upon this account, and see how you are prepared to enter into judgment with him, upon the blessed moments which have been so long, and so profusely enjoyed. "*Give an account of thy stewardship.*"

A time of probation, like all other blessings, is a special grace of God through Jesus Christ; but there are some considerations, which give it a higher estimation than many others. Its forfeiture by the fall, and the price which has been paid for that forfeiture, is one of inconceivable magnitude. In the transgression of Adam, the sentence of condemnation and of death passed upon us all. In the penalty annexed to his sin, life, and being, the shortest period of existence, or a momentary time of trial was taken from us. In a guilty first-father, we look upon ourselves as entombed before our birth, as consigned to the dreary caverns of eternal night, before we had once breathed

the vital air, without having had an opportunity to exercise one thought, or to cast one anxious look towards heaven and the happiness of the just; and upon our present existence, as that of a people dug out of their graves, and re-animated with life, after the worm of corruption had commenced his devastation upon their dissolving bodies. This is our time of probation. And to obtain this, to effect this unparalleled work, this miracle of miracles, the immensity of which, language cannot express, the Son of the Eternal God is nailed to the cross, his hands, his feet, his side are pierced, Calvary is drenched with his blood, heaven and earth are shaken, the sun is darkened, and the rocks rent, all nature trembles, and the universe is amazed,—the Son of the Eternal God expires in an agony, is wrapt in the mantle of death, and laid in the bowels of the earth.

This was the price at which the forfeiture of existence was paid, and a time of probation obtained. By this condescension, this humility, this suffering, and this interposition of omnipotent power, were each and all of the race of Adam, raised from the tomb of extinction, given a short life on earth, and in that life, a time of trial for the prize of immortality. At what nameless value then must we estimate this time. It is a period rescued from the dark regions of

endless death. What think you, brethren, were the views and emotions of Lazarus, or the son of the widow of Nain, when Jesus had burst for them the fetters of death, and restored them to life? How did they esteem, what value did they place upon that subsequent period of existence, which the omnipotence of the Saviour had, by a miracle, the most wonderful and unheard of, taken from their long and silent abode in the grave, and added to their time of probation, among the living inhabitants of the world? Could there have been any necessity with these men, for reminding them of their accountability, and for urging upon them, the importance of a faithful use of the precious days, with which the thread of their mortal life, had been lengthened out. Their own thoughts must have been their monitors, and their own sense of gratitude, a sufficient excitement to unslumbering diligence.

No more necessity should there be with us, raised by a greater miracle of omnipotent power from the grave of annihilation, the bands of eternal death, or the more dismal cells of endless despair, and given an accepted time, and a day of salvation. A remembrance of the blessed truth should never cease to admonish us, nor a love for such unspeakable mercies to stimulate our improvement.

The brevity of the time of our probation, is another consideration which enhances its value. A day, a month, a year, how short, how very short the space! And yet this is the duration of the life of man. It is a shadow, a dream, a vapour—almost as soon as we are sensible of existence, it is terminated. With constitutional good health, and with the care and precaution of great wisdom and prudence, you may calculate, provided you escape casualties and epidemics, upon a long life, a life of *eighty* years; but so frequently is an expectation of this kind disappointed, and so numerous are the accidents which blast the fairest prospects of long life, that we look upon a man of this age as a wonder—as a being who belongs to the other world rather than our own. But could you persuade yourself against all the doubts and uncertainties of the case, that eighty years will be the period of *your* mortal existence, reflect that the whole of this term is but a cypher, a nothing, that it will have passed away with the rapidity of a vision, and that its protracted duration, shall only have increased the sum of your accountability. The whole is but a year, a month, a day. And during this year, this month, this day, your accounts are to be closed. This is the only time you have to adjust them, and to prepare

for your final reckoning, with the Judge of quick and dead.

The time of our life is the time of our probation, and the only probation which will be allowed us for ever. In this short period, therefore, this year, this month, this day, are our characters to be formed for an eternal duration. Our salvation or our condemnation, our happiness or our misery, our weal or woe, not only for millions of millions of ages added to millions of millions of ages, but for an infinite, endless existence, this short year, this short month, this short day, is to fix and settle. What more can be wanting to render the value of time inestimable. We can compute its worth only by the anguish and despair of those who have wasted it in folly and sin. Let us then employ a few of its golden moments in rectifying the errors of the past.

And, first, have we always placed this inestimable value upon the time of our probation? Have we considered it as the medium of all other blessings and the only means by which they can be enjoyed? This we may possibly have done. But have we from childhood to the present hour, numbered our days as forming the awfully decisive criterion of our characters and our condition for eternity? Youth, alas, is generally spent with little or no regard to this momentous truth! And the inconsidera-

tion and folly of youth have an influence upon too many in maturer age. The habit of thoughtlessness and of contemplating nothing in its true light then becomes their habit as long as they live. Some influence of a truly religious principle, some illumination of the Divine Spirit does not seem to dispel all their blindness: for if it did, a correct estimate of time and a corresponding zeal and earnestness would follow. But where shall we find a zeal and earnestness proportionate to what the scanty space allowed us to make ready for death and judgment demand? Have any of *us* thus improved our day of grace? We have, indeed, many of us done something; but have we done, and are we doing with all our might, whatsoever our hands find to do, as though the time we are in the world was of unspeakable, immeasurable, and incomprehensible value to us, and as though we were certain that at the very next hour of our lives our Judge would appear and require an account of our stewardship. No, we are none of us thus in earnest: and the reason that we are not, is, that we are all more or less blinded, and do not attach to time the importance which is due to it.

Nothing is more incontestibly certain, than that through the goodness and mercy of Almighty God, the period of probation with each one of us, is always of sufficient length, and

no more than sufficient, for our final salvation and eternal welfare. No consideration, therefore, can in the slightest degree enhance or lessen its importance. It is all that it can be, it is of infinite value. But we do not believe this ; we do not conduct as if it were possible for it to be true. Demonstration shall not be wanting to our conviction of the justness of this remark.

Now, my brethren, did we each of us know that we had but one hour or one day more to live ; that within an hour or a day we must each receive, in the approach of death, that terrifying message—"Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward"—should we remain as cool and composed as we are at present ? Should we esteem this day and hour of no more importance than we now do ? or think of nothing to be done, and to be quickly done, which we have not already thought of ? Ah ! it is questionable whether in the alarm that would exist, the voice of the preacher could be heard. With what sighs, what lamentations, what shrieks, what impassioned prayers would the ceilings of this church resound ! Repentant tears would then flow from many an eye that is now languid and dry. How many temporal concerns which have not been attended to and disposed of as they ought to have been, but

have been left at loose ends or entirely neglected, under the presumption that there is always time enough to come, would then crowd upon the mind. Yet the recollection of these would soon be lost in the overwhelming thought of our immortal interests suspended by a single thread—a long self-examination to be entered into, and the accounts of many years to be adjusted in a moment—faith to be tried and proved—repentance to be made perfect, and love to be tested by charity and alms. A God of vengeance to be propitiated, and peace made with a God of mercy. Children, neighbours, friends, to be admonished and entreated: and, in short, a thousand things to be done, and a thousand accounts to be settled in the space of a single breath. Every action, every motion, and every look, would discover the importance which we attached to the few moments of time which we had yet to live. Language would be wholly inadequate to describe it.

And yet this would only be a true sense of the inestimable value of time. It would be attaching to it the importance only which is due to every hour of our existence. For if, through the goodness and mercy of Almighty God, the period of probation with each one of us is always of sufficient length and no more than sufficient for our final salvation and eternal welfare, then, whether we are to live twenty

years or but one day, matters not, because every minute of that period, be it longer or shorter, is of equally inestimable value and importance. That we do not consider it in this light is the blindness of our understandings. How then does our account stand? An error in the outset is likely to render the whole reckoning wrong—which will be found to be the case with us all. We none of us place a true estimate upon the value of time, and of course make not that diligent improvement of it which such an estimate would ensure. It is the case with almost all of the Christian world, with almost all professors of religion and members of the church of Christ, excepting a few sick and dying persons who see their graves already dug, their shrouds and their coffins made, their mournful funeral ceremonies preparing, and the hearse waiting to convey them to their last, long, long home. How then, my brethren, can we be at peace in our minds? How can we contemplate coolly, or expect any thing satisfactory, upon this subject of our accounts? Our blindness and stupidity, our failing to appreciate justly the value of our time of probation, and our consequent neglect to improve it to the utmost of our ability, are equally our condemnation.

We have not the consolation to reflect that this blindness is an incurable disease of human

nature. We see that there are events, that there are considerations which will dissipate it. There have been periods in our lives when all our senses were awake, and all our thoughts acute—when the importance of time appeared an inconceivable height and depth, and length and breadth, and we resolved to act forever after under this true and sublime impression. A certain prospect of approaching death and a judgment about to be revealed are sure to produce these effects, this more adequate conception of the importance of time, and this anxious though often transient solicitude to employ it all in the ways of wisdom. But there have been many saints who were always thus impressed—many who never forgot their death or their accountability, but who lived and conducted all their lives as if each day was to be their last, and the solemn period of their final reckoning. There are, we trust, some such Christians still in the world—some who think and act under the same impression with regard to the importance of time—that no considerations can enhance or diminish its value, and that the present hour is always subject to become the closing period of their mortal existence.

Lastly, the improvement of time is the improvement of all the talents which God has committed to our trust, and the abuse and

waste of it are the abuse and waste of every blessing with which we are indulged. If then the account is against us in this instance, it is also against us in each one yet to be named, and in each upon which we have already remarked. This is a more than unpleasant, but a no less just reflection. What is the sum of the best Christian's life among us? Which have been the most numerous, his virtuous or his sinful deeds? Alas! in the longest life, a life of which many years have been devoted to the service of God, it will be found upon an accurate investigation, that the majority is on the side of sin, and that more has been done for Satan than for Jesus Christ. The sallies, the passions, revels, vanities, and follies of youth outnumber the works of devotion, faith, and charity of maturer years. And if this be true of a long life, a life of which many years have been devoted to the service of God, what is that of most of us? What an immense balance against us! What numbers of sins to a single virtuous deed! And hence what scores of our days dissipated in vice to a single hour dedicated to the cause of our blessed Redeemer. How are we to settle for this deficiency, to give an account of our stewardship, and to make up for the time passed of our lives? Will you do it by the many years which you have yet to live? Alas! how know you that such will

be your favoured lot? What charter have you of an hour yet to come?

It has been said, indeed, that "with constitutional good health, and with the care and precaution of great wisdom and prudence, you may calculate, provided you escape casualties and epidemics, upon a long life—a life of eighty years." But are you for a moment secure from casualties? No. How many whose earthly existence is terminated instantly when they least expect it! Are you safe from epidemics in any place or at any time? No. How many during the past season fled from the city to avoid them, and were overtaken by them in the country! Do you really possess this *constitutional good* health? Few, very few, have that oak in their physical structure which can withstand the storms and tempests of so many years. But, above all, have you this great wisdom and prudence sufficient for the requisite care and precaution. Consummate arrogance to pretend to them. Yet be it so—you will then direct your feet to the *paths* of wisdom. No, no, my friend, you have not the faintest prospect of living to this advanced age. Your days are numbered: your time is that of "*a hireling*:" and in the sudden and melancholy deaths of companions and acquaintances, the scanty span of your own mortal career is marked and measured. Go, then; set your

house in order, prepare to follow them, and with them to give an account of your stewardship.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, &c

S E R M O N X I .

ST. LUKE XVI 2

Give an account of thy stewardship

We have, for some weeks, been contemplating our obligations as the stewards of God, and our accountableness to him for all the blessings and all the means of grace which he bestows upon us. The magnitude of our responsibility has been made to appear from the character of the office we sustain, the design of the investiture and the just right which the Donor must always possess, to exact a strict account. No doubt can remain, of the immense obligations under which we are laid, nor of the severity of the final reckoning to which we shall be called. These considerations are all-sufficient, do we but half realize them, to induce us to begin, and to continue as long as we live, the most scrutinizing and unsparing account with ourselves.

But there is another important light in which we have not contemplated the subject, which, if alluded to at all, has been only incidentally, and which presents us with triple inducements to diligence and zeal. This may be

termed the *discrimination* of divine justice. The extent of God's requisitions is in exact proportion to the extent of his favours. The account we shall have to give, will be measured with the greatest precision by the blessings we have received. There is no injustice with God: and *all his judgments are done in equity and truth*. His infinitely perfect justice originates in his infinite wisdom and goodness—in the rectitude, the eternal and unchangeable rectitude of his nature. He is the *incorruptible* God. He does not therefore exact an account for the use of talents which he had never given. He does not exact an account for the use of *ten*, where he had given but *five*. He does not call his stewards to a reckoning upon goods, which had never been in their possession, but for having wasted those which they had actually received. It was only the wicked and slothful servant, the idle and ignorant fool, who *knew him to be a hard man reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not strewed*. The requisitions of God are infinitely just and merciful. Yet where he has indeed given ten talents he requires an account for the use of ten. This is the demand of perfect and inflexible justice—this is the unalterable rule by which all the nations of the earth shall be judged. “To whom much is given, from them will much be required.”

But apply this rule or principle of judgment to our own case, my brethren, and see if it lessens the sum of our accountability. No—it enhances it, not three but ten fold. The Jews who lived under the dispensation by Moses, shall be judged by that dispensation. “They that have sinned under the law shall be judged by the law.” As the illumination which they received was partial, as the gifts bestowed upon them were comparatively few, their required account will be in the same diminished proportion. And the heathen nations upon whom the rays of divine revelation never shone, shall be judged by no precepts of the revealed word of God. “They that have sinned without law shall be judged without law.” “They not having the law are a law unto themselves.” Faint having been their light, their knowledge, or their gifts, small will be the severity of their account. But christians to whom Jesus Christ and his Gospel have been published and made known, will be judged by all the rules and obligations of that Gospel. Living under the broad beams of the Sun of righteousness, the curtain between them and eternity having been lifted up, and all the mysteries of the invisible world and of the immortal God disclosed to their view, thrice tremendous shall be their account. Inconceivable its severity with the careless and unfaithful.

Say not, however, from this consideration, that you would prefer the darkness and ignorance of the heathen to your own light and knowledge. Such is the profane and blasphemous ingratitude of too many. And such a sentiment shall add a thousand horrors to the terror of their last account. Can it be supposed that there is among us one person who indulges in a sentiment like this? You would prefer the darkness and ignorance of a heathen to the light and knowledge of a christian, because the account which the heathen shall be required to render, will be less strict and severe. And is this your thankfulness and gratitude to God for the inestimable blessing of illumination by his Gospel? But to say nothing of this; do you carry the principle through and maintain the same sentiment upon all subjects? Do you prefer to be always poor and penniless, because if you were blessed with riches you might abuse them? Do you despise learning and education, a knowledge of business, of men and things, and do you prefer the low and scarcely perceptible intellects of the idiot, because, if you were endowed with genius and shining talents you might indeed misapply them? “You prefer the darkness and ignorance of the heathen to the light and knowledge of the christian, because the account which the heathen shall be

required to render, will be less strict and severe;" and would you upon the same principle prefer even before the condition of the heathen, the dullness and stupidity of the brute, from whom no account whatever shall be exacted? Such a sentiment, if not the same, is little less revolting than that of those who curse the day of their birth, and revile the goodness of the Almighty God for giving them an existence in the world. Confident we are that there can be none so depraved in this congregation—none so insensible of the divine goodness, manifested in all the blessings of providence, and by a far higher display in the blessings of grace, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In all the gifts of heaven, God has but one design, and that design is our happiness and final welfare. They all proceed from his pure and unbounded benevolence. They are none of them designed as snares and contrivances to involve us in ruin. They are not bestowed to increase our accountability, but to increase our enjoyment, now and for ever, and our greater accountability is only the natural result of the higher favours with which we are indulged. Such is the benevolence of God in all his dispensations, whether in a profusion of the good things of this present world, or in the more durable riches of divine grace, and in the su-

perior knowledge and light revealed by his glorious Gospel. And to refuse to acknowledge, to acquiesce and to rejoice in our greater responsibility, is to murmur against God for the most exalted acts of his goodness, for the supreme benevolence of all his designs, and for those special and wonderful interpositions of his grace, intended to furnish us with the means of securing to ourselves a happiness permanent and eternal, elevated in degree above that of millions of the blessed, equal to that of the most favoured saint, and next in order to the bliss of the highest seraph. "*One star differeth from another star in glory.*" Such is the infinite, unspeakable love which God has manifested toward us. Our account will indeed be more strict and severe. It ought to be. Nothing could be more just; and none but those who hate rectitude and love injustice, will refuse to acquiesce and to rejoice in this truth. At the same time it should excite our fears, our anxiety, and concern, and become a threefold inducement to diligence, activity, and zeal. Another still more sufficient reason for our continuing, as long as we live, the most scrutinizing and unsparing account with ourselves.

In preceding discourses we have investigated and canvassed many of the isolated duties of religion. Many, which are incumbent upon

us as citizens, as members of society, and inhabitants of this present world, but it is to be hoped, that all our remarks have had some spiritual bearing, and that to prepare men for eternal judgment, has been the chief object of them all. It is now proposed to consider religion as a whole, and its several parts in connection. And you, my hearers, who listen to a sermon for the sake of its morality only, and have no relish for the spiritual and heavenly doctrines, which to inculcate and establish, was the great object of the blessed Redeemer in his incarnation and sufferings, will hear nothing to-day to satisfy your morbid tastes.

We are invited to account with our consciences and our God for improvement for our faithful use, as spiritual stewards, of *the dispensations of divine grace through boundless mercy, in the institution of a church with its ordinances and privileges for the securing of eternal salvation.* An explanation of this subject is the history of grace. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, is the revelation of boundless mercy to a perishing world. To be sincerely, habitually, and devotedly in all things, his disciples and followers, is the improvement required at our hands.

The benevolence of God's infinitely pure and perfect nature, moved him to create this

earth and to form man upon it—man endowed with a soul, whose powers and faculties were below those only of the angelic hosts, that surrounded the bright throne of heaven, and were capable of exalting him to the same glory and bliss. The whole design of God was to impart happiness to millions of intelligent beings. But to the sorrow and anguish of the universe, one single test of the virtue of man proved his ruin, collected the displeasure of divine justice in a cloud of thunder over him, instantly prepared to break upon his guilty and defenceless head, and involved him and his posterity in darkness, misery, and despair. Mercy interposing in the character of the eternal Son, the second person of the glorious Godhead, withheld the gathered tempest from annihilating their being. Mercy continued their existence and the supply of their temporal wants. Mercy granted to a few of them, some imperfect illuminations from above: some indistinct discoveries of the goodness which should one day be revealed—seen in the divine communications to the patriarchs, to Moses, and the prophets—in the institution of the Israelitish church, and the dispensation of the law from Mount Sinai.

Still, traces of the desolating anger of offended justice were every where to be seen. Every where gross darkness prevailed. Corrupt from

birth and constantly inclined to deface all nature with their abominations. men appeared to live only to be punished for their crimes. Such was the condition of all the Gentile world. That of the Jewish nation, though less deplorable, was, notwithstanding, marked with the rigours of divine Justice. Often they seemed to suffer under more terrible vengeance than their idolatrous neighbours. Their own depravity and the severity of the law which had been given them, determined their condemnation, "Condemnation was by the law," and faint was the light that shone upon them. Thus the whole of mankind *sat in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death.* No sun cheered with its brightness, no moon reflected the rays of a sun. Throughout the universe a night of gloom and woe extended.

But in the midst of this scene of wretchedness and despair, lo, the heavens are opened, and the Son of God descends to the earth. The clouds flee away, the darkness is dispelled, light breaks upon the view of longing mortals, "The Sun of righteousness arises with healing in his wings." The sword of vengeance falls from the hand of the destroying angel, who stood upon the circle of the earth, and he retires forever to give place to that other mighty angel, who, flying in the midst of heaven, proclaims the everlasting gospel to all

the inhabitants of a world, "*Peace on earth, and good-will from heaven to men.*" Mysteries hidden from the beginning of time are now made known and published abroad. The Almighty is revealed to all his creatures as a God of mercy, of goodness, benevolence, and love. Before this period, his wrath and his justice were always conspicuous, but in Jesus Christ, his compassion and kindness to sinners are shown to be triumphant. Heaven bows to the earth. The great, eternal, and incomprehensible God comes down to men.

Such was the condescension of Almighty goodness in the incarnation of the Saviour. Man was miserable, and the Son of the Highest stoops to relieve him. Man was in darkness, and he comes a light to illumine him. Man was under the infliction of divine wrath, and subject to the dominion of death and hell, and he comes to appease and satisfy that wrath, and to break forever the dominion of death and hell. Man was driven from paradise, and from happiness, and he comes to open to him the gates of a paradise in the skies, and to give him assurance of a happiness incorruptible and immortal at the right hand of his Father. To effect this, he suffered and died, was buried, and rose again. To effect this, he ascended to heaven, and sent down his Holy Spirit upon those whom he had commissioned

to declare his name to all people, and nations, and languages, and tongues. To effect this, the remotest corners of the world were made to hear the sound of his Gospel. And to effect this, the salvation of sinners, as long as there are sinners to be saved, he established his Church with its ordinances and privileges, based on the decree that "the gates of hell should never prevail against it."

The ordinances of this church are Christ's positive institutions, among which are Baptism and the Holy Supper. Its privileges are the light which it communicates, and the blessed promises which it holds forth, through the ministration of the Gospel. The church of Christ is the depository of the Gospel of Christ. What is the nature of this light, and how necessary for man in his fallen and benighted state we have seen. It reveals to us all the truths of heaven, essential to our happiness in the present world, and our salvation in the world to come. By it, the perfection of God's attributes, the benevolence of his design in creating us and his boundless mercy in our redemption, are fully made known to us. By it we are brought to see clearly, the depravity and corruption of our nature, the turpitude of our sins, as being a rebellion against an infinitely holy and gracious God; and the effica-

cy of that blood of the cross, which brings in an everlasting atonement. By it we are taught the necessity of repentance and faith, that we must verily, and indeed be regenerated and born again. " *not of flesh, nor of the will of man, but by the power of the Eternal Spirit.* By it we receive an assurance of this gift of the spirit, and also that *obedience* is its unfailing fruit. By it we are warned of a judgment to come, and of the condemnation of the impenitent and unbelieving. By it we are conducted forward to behold the joyful resurrection of the just, and their glorious inheritance beyond the grave. By it we are instructed to perceive that the protecting arm of God ever rests upon the heads of his faithful people, while they remain on earth, that he constantly communicates to them life and strength in the ordinances of his sanctuary, and that they are allied by an inseparable union to the nature and blessedness of the Divine Redeemer. Grace flows in a thousand streams of light, of life, and love. It is that Eternal Word, the soul and spirit of the religion which God has given to mankind. It is the everlasting Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, attended and invigorated by the irresistible influences of the Holy Ghost, the comforter.

All these things are conveyed to us *through the Church*, which Christ instituted, and has preserved from one generation to another. He formed it among men for this great end: to keep alive among them, from age to age a knowledge of those spiritual and eternal truths which were to make them wise unto salvation, and to give them a life everlasting in his kingdom above. The price of this church was his own death upon the cross. He purchased it," says an apostle, "by his own blood." Estimate, brethren, the value of the blessing by the price which was paid to obtain it. Estimate the value of it by the wretchedness of the world before it existed. Estimate it by those innumerable treasures it contains, and estimate it by the perdition of such as despise this highest favour of heaven. "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*" Let us prepare our minds to give a strict account of our stewardship, in the dispensation of the Gospel and grace of God. And let us be assured, that, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

O God, grant us grace to fear thee, and to keep thy commandments. Grant us grace to *know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ*

whom thou hast sent. Grant us grace to know and to do thy will,—to serve thee faithfully here on earth, and finally, to inherit thy glorious promises through Jesus Christ, our Lord

And now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N X I I .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

“ Give an account of thy stewardship.”

Against the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, this is the denunciation of the blessed Saviour. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee.* What reflections must this denunciation suggest to our minds? Ours, to which the instructions and the miracles of Jesus Christ, have always been present? Against us the profligate inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, and even of Admah and Zeboim, the Sodomites, may rise in judgment. If the

heart is susceptible of painful sensations, the possibility of such an event must excite them. All the most agitating and alarming considerations are awakened by the requisition to each of us, "*Give an account of thy stewardship.*"

We tremble as we proceed. Those wretched people, whose punishment in the day of judgment may be more tolerable than ours, have been for thousands of years suffering "*the vengeance of eternal fire.*" What, then, is the punishment of the impenitent sinners who inhabited the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? And what shall ours be, if we remain in impenitence and unbelief? if we slight the glorious privileges which divine mercy and love have conferred upon us? Ah, says the Saviour of men, "Agree with thine adversary *quickly*, whilst thou art in the way with him,—lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officers, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Make peace with thy conscience and thy God, and quickly give them an account of thy stewardship, by repentance and reformation. Enter into this account with thyself, upon the manner in which thou hast improved the dispensations of

boundless mercy for the securing of thy eternal salvation.

“From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Jesus Christ.” From a child you have lived under the shadow of the sanctuary, you have been blessed with all the opportunities of grace, and with all needful knowledge of eternal things, the light of heaven has irradiated, and its comforts invigorated your soul by the ordinances and privileges of that church, which the blood of the Son of God, has perpetuated among men. Every spiritual truth is in your possession. Every spiritual advantage of the most highly favoured of mankind, is at your disposal. How have you employed, how have you occupied these, not *ten*, but ten thousand talents? Alas, have you squandered them all, and become like the servant who owed his Lord this immense debt, “but forasmuch as he had naught to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made?” See, examine, investigate.

The first great and important revelation, is that of the *being* and *attributes* of God. What a treasure would a knowledge of these have been esteemed by those heathen sages, who after a life spent in the most laborious study

upon the subject, could arrive at no one certainty of the truth! Have you rendered to this God of all possible perfection, your supreme adoration and love? Have you considered it the most exalted privilege of your existence to worship and serve him? Have you done homage to his power and greatness by placing all your dependence upon him alone? And have you done the highest honour to his moral perfections by imitating them in your feelings and conduct among your fellow-beings? See, examine, investigate, give an account of your stewardship. See, if you have never, like the reprobates of old, "chosen not to retain this knowledge of God," and preferred before it the delusion of a wicked heart? See, if you have not a thousand times rendered supreme adoration to the most worthless objects of the world, and found your greatest gratification in serving them rather than God? See, if you have never placed your dependance upon an arm of flesh, and thus idolized the creature and done homage to him instead of the Creator? Alas, have you never dishonoured the true God and given glory to the prince of darkness, by indulging, through malice or a desire of revenge, some of the passions of infernal spirits? what an account in your reckoning! Yet I place no such charge against any. I say only, see, examine, investigate. Give an account to

your own consciences, and it is enough. If we would not be judged, we must learn to judge ourselves.

It has been remarked that the *privileges* of the Church of Christ are its light and promises. These are the revelations of which it is the medium. An examination into our improvement of a few of these will decide the nature of our account with regard to the whole. And this partial examination must suffice, since volumes would not comprize all the important ideas, which the most cursory survey of this part of our subject suggests to the mind.

Jesus Christ is set before us: Jesus Christ crucified, as the sole and only method of salvation. What does this imply? That we are in a state of condemnation. That divine wrath is preparing to bury us in hopeless ruin. That, unless we fly to him for safety, destruction and misery will speedily overtake us, when we shall perish without remedy. It implies that we are sinners,—that we are born in sin—and that both from our native corruption, and also, till more, from our actual transgressions, we are guilty and wretched beings, destitute of one particle of goodness, with “no health,” no soundness, no moral excellence about us. But these truths are also revealed as well as inferred from others. The means too are revealed which Jesus Christ makes use of to recover

us from this abyss of depravity. His Holy Spirit was sent down upon the day of Penticost for this purpose, and to effect it has continued his operation among men even to the present hour. So clearly established by the Gospel is such an agency of the spirit, and so certainly does it appear, that none can become christians without a spiritual influence, that it is said "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his."

To embrace the salvation of Jesus Christ, we are required to believe in him, and to love him with all our heart, mind, and strength. We are required to know that we are perishing and dying creatures—to know and to feel the awful weight of our depravity and sin,—that "the burden of them is intolerable." To embrace this salvation we are required to repent and be converted,—to become changed and renewed in our hearts—to be washed and sanctified by the spirit of God—to be verily born again and from above. To embrace this salvation we are required to become annihilated to ourselves and to the world, "to be buried with Christ unto death" and to arise from this grave in a new and heavenly nature, a nature affined to that of the holy and blessed God. To inspire us with irresistible motives to embrace and to become perfected in this salvation, besides the consideration of all that has been

done from the foundation of the world to the present moment, told in one matchless act, the flowing blood of Calvary, the infinitely glorious and eternal God condescends to enter into *covenant* with us, and fills up the relation of his mercies with promises of goodness without bounds—promises of the life that now is, and that which is to come. Promises of the comforts, of the aids and the illuminations of his spirit,—promises of his divine presence like as to our first parents in the garden of Eden—and promises which exceed all that we could ask or think, in translation to a state of endless fruition.

To preserve some knowledge of divine things in the world, the Jewish Church was instituted by Moses : so to preserve a knowledge of these great and glorious truths, as before intimated, the *church of Christ* with its special ordinances is established among men. It is to perpetuate divine revelation. For this reason, as might be expected, his blessing attends his own appointments. These appointments are channels through which grace is communicated, and a constant connection between heaven and earth sustained. No depravity, no rage of men or of devils has been able to frustrate this design of the divine counsels.

A proud infidel and a man of the highest grade of talents, once boasted that he was able

and *would* destroy and erase from the memory of the world, what had been done by twelve poor fishermen. A whole nation afterwards in the height of their phrenzy undertook the same, and solemnly decreed that *there was no God*. And what was the result? what did these grasshoppers effect? The same that a few miserable fools and wretches in this city, styling themselves a "*free-press association*" shall effect.—Nothing—nothing but their own disgrace and infamy. "He that dwelleth in heaven laughed; the Lord had them in derision." They have gone to the shades of forgetfulness, and their puny efforts against the religion of the blessed Redeemer are perceived only by the brighter aspect which that religion has assumed in the increased number and zeal of its friends. This is for ever the final issue of all attempts to undermine the christian church. So certainly is it the depository of the truth, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. For its stability, therefore, never indulge an apprehension or a fear. But of our individual improvement we have not the same assurances on which to ground reliance. By such improvement we become workers together with God in all the great events of the world—in his subversion of the schemes of infidelity, and his promotion of the glory of the church.—and without it those schemes shall

be subverted, and the church shall arise and shine in her glory, but *we* shall be covered with confusion. Again, I say then, see, examine, investigate.

Have you received Jesus Christ crucified as the sole and only method of salvation? Have you never thought of placing dependence on any thing else? Neither upon your supposed innocence, your virtues, nor your christian attainments? You have been sensible then that you were in a state of condemnation by nature. You have felt that in this condition, fears like waters were on every side of you. And in agonies of despair you have cried to heaven, "Help, Lord, or we perish." You have seen and felt, my hearer, that you are a sinner both by nature and by practice. If this be true, it is true, also, that you entertain the most humiliating views of yourself—of your natural weakness, infirmity, and inability to perform one acceptable act, or even to think one acceptable thought, save through the agency and grace of the Holy Spirit. How degrading are such truths! How repugnant to the pride of our hearts! How often may you have felt a self-complacency, and have commended yourself for that which was even odious in the sight of God! And such sentiments may have laid the foundation for errors without end. Again, see, examine, investigate.

Does the spirit of Christ dwell in you? Have you embraced his salvation by faith in his all-atoning blood—and are your supreme love and affection centred in him? This is a difficult point to be determined by all those unfaithful and lukewarm souls, who would divide their affections between the present and a future state, between Christ and Belial, between God and the world, and who are all their lifetime halting between the path which is to conduct them to heaven, and that which leads them down to hell. If you have never been made deeply sensible of your corruption and depravity by nature, it is no wonder that you are in utter uncertainty about your christian state. Has this, then, been the case? Have you indeed felt an abiding conviction of your being a miserable sinner, and that thence an intolerable weight of guilt pressed you down to the hopeless pit of perdition? If so, have you repented and been converted? Has such a sorrow for sin, wrought upon your heart as to cause entire reformation, an entire new life? And, above all, have you become renewed in the spirit of your mind? Is obedience more than an outward performance? Is your *heart* changed, from its natural state, regenerated, renovated, and sanctified by the Holy Ghost? Is this the improvement you have made by the gifts of salvation;—by the light of the di-

vine word, and the blessed influences of the Divine Spirit, which are constantly afforded you? "*Behold!*" saith Christ, "*I stand at the door and knock;*" and have these calls of the spirit, these ceaseless warnings of grace, been slighted; what have you to answer to your conscience or your God? What is the character of your conscience? What will you say when you come to be judged?"

But as an evidence, my friend, that you have truly and sincerely embraced the salvation of the blessed Redeemer, and have been *born again and from above*, have you become annihilated to self and to the world? Have your passions and your earthly affections been crucified and buried in the tomb of Jesus Christ, and have you been raised from thence wholly a new creature? New in your desires of purity and holiness? New in a meek, a quiet, a peaceable, and heavenly disposition? New in a cheerful and forgiving temper of mind? New in a tender and delicate conscience—and now in continual and intimate communion with the Father of our spirits? If this be your progress in the use of the means of salvation, if this be your growth in grace, your account is a fair one—you have nothing to fear, for nothing shall separate you from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We know that you have passed from death unto life.

Yet if after all your supposed raptures and fancied attainments in grace, you are selfish and in love with the world, if your passions are unsubdued, and your affections unmortified, if you have still a proud, a turbulent, and restless disposition; a censorious and unforgiving temper of mind, a loose and blunted conscience, and a disrelish for devotion and prayer, where no show is to be made, no worldly ends to be answered, and no eye to witness your acts of piety but that of Omniscience; depend upon it, that, as God is true, you are yet *in the gall of bitterness and in the bands of iniquity*. The account of no desperate and hardened sinner will be more dreadful than your own.

But, finally, in order to be inspired with the most irresistible motives to a new and heavenly life, are those great and eternal truths revealed in Jesus Christ ever fixed and abiding in your mind? Is the tremendous majesty of justice always before you? Do you meditate on the terror of that day when the Son of God shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory to judge the world, and upon the inconceivably fearful condition of those who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the glory of his ap-

pearing. Do you consider how much has been done to free you from the calamities of that day? That the whole dispensation of boundless mercy in Jesus Christ is to prepare men for eternal judgment; and have you received and improved the gifts of grace, with a view to this great event?

In what manner have you estimated the ordinances of the church? Have you treated them as the holy institutions of God, or as the requirements of men? He has ordained *baptism* to be a sign and seal of regeneration, and as indispensable to the very name of a christian. Have you been baptised? if so, have you offered up your children to God in the same ordinance? And being washed with "the washing and regeneration," have you lived as a regenerate soul? See, I entreat you, examine, investigate.

Again, Christ has ordained his *holy supper* to signify, and through which to communicate to us his constant support of our spiritual life, and if his words as applied to it be true, "Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you," then the receiving of this ordinance is as necessary to the health and salvation of our souls as the receiving of daily food is to the support of animal existence.

Have you viewed this sacred institution in any such light? Have you improved it ac-

cordingly ? If so, you are never absent from the communion of the Lord's table, unless compelled to be by imperious circumstances. I say not, that the contrary is true, I say not, that you are always absent, or that you are so indifferent as to come there on the great festivals only, and but two or three times a year, and to retire frequently from the church at the very moment "the holy mysteries" are about to be celebrated. I only ask you all to see, examine, and investigate for yourselves.

And I ask you, brethren, if your consciences are quiet and acquit you upon this and the other subjects which have now been presented for your consideration. Do they not array a formidable account against you ? How then can you be prepared to carry up that account to your last great reckoning ? *If our hearts condemn us, God is far greater than our hearts.* Reflect that in the grave, to which you are going, preparation will be over, and a place for repentance no more to be found. Now is the only period for improvement, and the only day of salvation. God give us grace to make our calling and election sure.

Now, to the Father, &c.

SERMON XIII.

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

"Give an account of thy stewardship."

It has been a question among moralists, whether a love of novelty was to be approved or condemned; whether it was a virtuous principle or an infirmity. But there is no question of its being a natural propensity of the human mind. It is a passion as universal as our species. We are none of us satisfied with always seeing the same object, or with always hearing the same subject again and again repeated. Nor is there any appetite, which is not, sooner or later, cloyed with a uniform diet. Some variety seems essential to the preservation of life and health. So in regard to the mind, a perfect sameness becomes wearisome, and to prevent a suspension of its faculties, new objects must be presented to the attention. It would seem, therefore, that a love of novelty had a tendency to preserve the mental energies.

It is not to be denied that this passion, when inordinate, may urge us on from one excess to another, and terminate in the most disastrous

consequences, with reference to truth and wisdom. Indulged without restraint, it may lead us into innumerable errors. But then, all this is no argument against its *temperate indulgence*. And if such indulgence be necessary to preserve the energies of the mind, the principle itself appears to be virtuous rather than vicious, and to require to be approved of, instead of being condemned. And, like many other propensities of our nature, commendable when restrained within the bounds of moderation, and to be reprobated only, when carried to excess.

But, be this as it may, Jesus Christ himself has plainly intimated, that the love of novelty is sometimes to be gratified: "*Every scribe,*" says he, "*which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is a householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*" By this declaration he would have us to understand that his ministers, when rightly instructed in his word, and consulting the best methods to instruct others, must present to them *new* objects as well as old ones, and thus keep alive that attention, which languishes by perpetual sameness. Truths old and eternal are rendered new and more striking by being presented in a new form. The parables of our Lord are an ample commentary upon his precept just recited. By a

novelty and beauty which human genius can never equal, they arrest the duldest attention, and carry home to the heart the simplest truths with an irresistible force. Hence we learn, both by the example and precept of Christ, that instead of complaining and finding fault with mankind for being wearied with an everlasting sameness, saying, that what is good can never be told too often, and ought always to satisfy them, instead of forever reprobating their passion for novelty, it is our duty to endeavour, to a certain extent, to gratify that passion. It is our duty to introduce to their consideration things *new* as well as old, and when we can interest their attention in no other way, to study to do it by the novelty of the objects with which they are presented.

In many preceding discourses, I have been labouring, brethren, to lead you to a settlement of your accounts as the stewards of God. I have remarked upon many of the important blessings with which you are entrusted, pointed out the manner in which you are required to use them, and have also in many cases investigated critically the improvement and application which you had actually made. But all this you may say is an old subject: its novelty has fled. We know all these things. We know that life and being, mental faculties, means of information and knowledge; health,

friends, children, parents, property, reputation, opportunities of benevolence, sources of religious instruction, ability to instruct and improve others, a time of probation, and the dispensations of Divine grace through boundless mercy in the institution of a church, with its ordinances and privileges, for the securing of eternal salvation, are all blessings, inestimable blessings, for which we are accountable to God the sole giver. We know, too, that we have not been as faithful in a wise and prudent use of any of these favours as we might have been, and that our account is therefore unsatisfactory to our own consciences. But since we know all this, of what service is it to dwell upon the subject so long? Something *new* would be far more pleasing.

I might well ask, brethren, if it is possible, till this account is adjusted and settled to the satisfaction of our own consciences, and the acceptance of our God, to dwell upon it too long. But I shall leave this to be determined by each one's own judgment and sense of propriety. There is a *new item* in this account.—An article possessing all the characters of novelty which are required; though it is doubtful whether it has the same quality of pleasing, as new objects in general. As a special blessing of heaven, it solicits your most solemn attention, and as a favour for whose use and

improvement an account must be given, demands your most anxious concern. It is altogether new as to the light in which we view it. This article is affliction.

The *times* and the *number* in which God calls us to an account, comprise the judgments visited upon the faithless and forward children of men, and might be thought to embrace all the afflictions of the present life: but this is not the case. Affliction is often among the choicest blessings which are imparted to us. We are recommended therefore to the manner in which we receive and improve it, and may well enter into a reckoning with ourselves upon the subject. The further object of the present discourse will be to illustrate and enforce these propositions.

It is first asserted, that *affliction is often among the choicest blessings which are imparted to us*. This may seem to be a strange doctrine, but upon examination you will find it divested of all *objectionable novelty*, and as old as the Bible. It is the Bible which authorizes us to declare, that affliction is often designed as a favour, and not as a judgment. It is there called a *chastisement*. What are our ideas of chastisement? What are those of such as have once had prudent and affectionate parents, who, by a due degree of severity in their early discipline, led them, and preserved them

in the paths of virtue and religion? You may recollect times when those prudent and affectionate parents chastised you for your faults or offences, and you might then have thought their treatment cruel, but your ideas now are far different. You judged of it, then, in the anguish of your grief, and from the bitterness of your feelings alone; but you have long since, considered calmly, and reflected that the chastisement and severity of a parent saved you from a thousand snares of vice, and have thus been the cause of preserving your life, your reputation, and your virtue. Instead, therefore, of reckoning that chastisement among the evils which have fallen to your share, you class it among your highest blessings, because it has resulted in the greatest possible good. Such, too, you are persuaded was the expectation of the parental love which dictated it.

For the same reasons, the afflictions of Providence are blessings. They are intended as chastisements, not so much to punish, as to correct our faults. They are dictated by the same Divine love, which bestows other blessings. *Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.* Why? because chastening is absolutely necessary to our final salvation; and whatever is necessary to our final salvation, must be a greater good than any present earthly favour.

Al! distressed soul! writhing under the correcting rod of the Almighty, can you believe, can you feel the justness of this sacred truth? Can you dry up your tears, and staunch the bleeding of your heart from such reflections? *Not from appearance, but judge from the intended result.* Come and listen to what the Lord himself saith: "*O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.*" Here also what his prophet saith: "*For he will not cast off forever; but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. It is good for me," said David, "that I have been afflicted. For before that, I went astray, but now have I learned thy testimonies."*

Again, afflictions are represented to us by Scripture as *trials*, and indeed fiery trials, to prove our faith and love. As medicinal fire is necessary for the purifying and refining of metals, so these are necessary to test and to purify our christian character. "Beloved," says St. Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you, but rejoice." And, "Ye greatly rejoice that the trial

of your faith, being much more precious than of *gold* that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.* But could the Apostle have called upon his christian brethren, to whom he was writing, to rejoice at evil? Certainly not. Affliction, therefore, is not an evil, but a blessing.

Yet, why do we labour to prove that of which the demonstration is constantly before our eyes? We see it in the providential chastisements of every year. With trembling hearts, and tears of joy, mingled in our cup of bitterness, we have witnessed it in that most dreadful scourge which visited us during the past season.* Ah, "Ye afflicted Davids, ye mourning Rachels, and ye disconsolate Naomis," you, you are the demonstration of this truth. Your penitential tears, and your returning faith and love, show us how great are the blessings of affliction. God grant that in you may be verified, the assurance of the Apostle, *That these light afflictions which are but for a moment, may work out for you, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* But the benefit and blessing, like those of all the other favours of heaven, are in exact proportion to our wise and faithful improvement; and this, it may be feared, is in few instances what we have just

* The Cholera of July, August, and September, 1832.

supposed. Alas, my friend, are you able to give this good account of your stewardship? Have the afflictions which Divine Providence has sent upon you, produced those penitential tears, and that return to your first love, of which they were so eminently calculated to be the occasion? Have they created your humility, dissipated your lukewarmness, and revived your languishing faith? Have they, in many cases, produced so much as a settled and habitual seriousness?

One has been afflicted with embarrassment and loss in his temporal concerns. Riches have taken to them wings and flown away. Ah, a bare competence may have been denied you, and winds and waves have seemed to conspire to reduce you to the most abject penury. Have such distressing events weaned you from the love of this present world, and persuaded you to fix your treasure in heaven? Or have they only increased your avidity, and made your eagerness and anxiety about the objects of time an eternal vexation to yourself and others? Such is too often the abuse of this kind of chastisement.

Another has been visited with sickness. Death seemed at the door—friends and physicians despaired. And have you thence preserved an indelible impression of the brevity, the uncertainty, and the vanity of human life?

Have you from thence become lastingly contrite, religious, and devout? Have you from thence been quickened to diligence in every duty, and induced to make the service of your God, and the salvation of your soul, the great business of your lengthened existence? These were your resolutions at that fearful crisis. You wept, you sighed, you prayed, you promised, and vowed, that if God would spare your life, and add a few more to the number of your days, you would devote them all to him, and would henceforth think of nothing else but preparation for eternity. Such, too, are often our vows and resolutions, when our near and dear friends seem to be threatened with immediate death. But what, my brethren, is the almost invariable result? Alas, where shall we find language sufficiently lamentable to express the futility of this repentance, and this improvement of the afflicting dispensations of a merciful God? Health is no sooner restored than the dominion of sin assumes its seat over the whole soul. All the resolutions and promises of a sick-bed are forgotten and entirely erased from the memory. The wretched man seems more hardened and stupid than ever. And he pursues the objects of the world, as if they had acquired additional charms from the circumstance of his having been rescued out of the very jaws of the grave. This is the

sorrowful account of the great majority of those, who, by sickness and danger, are warned to make haste and delay not, to be at peace with their God.

And does death itself produce in general a better improvement or more lasting consequences with the living? Ah, my friend, reckon with yourself—give an account to your conscience and your God. Other modes of correction have failed of the desired effect, and Divine Providence has had recourse to that fearful rod whose scourges cannot be felt without the most excruciating and despairing anguish. Death has been sent into your dwelling—death has taken from you a child, a parent, a companion or a friend. This sad and sorrowful affliction proceeded from infinite mercy and was designed only for your good—to awaken you out of the slumber of your fatal security—to make you sensible of your own uncertain hold on life and the unspeakable importance of obtaining a better one in the world to come. Has this, my dear friend, been your improvement? Have you become more deeply penetrated by a sense of the vanity of all that is human? Are you, from those painful breaches and separations which death has occasioned, any less attached to the momentary objects of time? And have you from thence been quickened in your diligence to

secure *an inheritance incorruptable, undefiled, and that fadeth not away?* If this is not the case, your destiny—I had almost said, is now sealed. For we never remain stationary under these dispensations of heaven. If we are not made better by them, we are made infinitely worse—we are hardened till our condition is hopeless.

Can a consideration be adduced more urgent than this for our entering into the closest scrutiny with ourselves and never quitting the examination of our hearts till we are satisfied that all God's dispensations to us are, in some good degree, rightly improved, and that we can give a fearless, though humble account of our stewardship. O, my brethren, *it is but a little while*, when he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. *"The son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work; and commanded his porter to watch. Watch, ye, therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh,—at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all. WATCH.*

Now to the Father, Son, &c.

S E R M O N X I V

ST. LUKE XVI. 2.

Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.

How tremendous was that message which God sent unto David by the mouth of his prophet! *I offer thee these three things, choose thou one of them, that I may do it unto thee. Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? Or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies while they pursue thee? Or that there be three days pestilence in thy land?* Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. To what a dreadful state must his mind have been reduced. In what distressing perplexity must he have found himself inextricably bound. What could he answer, when the very choice of evils submitted to him, was calculated to drive him to the brink of despair?

In mournful perspective those evils passed before him. Pale and meagre famine extending to every corner of the country—the heavens made iron and the earth parched to a stone—the despairing cries of hunger and thirst every where piercing the air, and that numberless train of diseases which is the

never-failing result, seizing and prostrating in death both man and beast. And these calamities accumulating and increasing upon a whole nation for seven long years. Or war, the bloody scourge of a sinful people, raging with devastation and aggravated horrors throughout his land. The enemies whom he had been accustomed to vanquish, haughtily and cruelly triumphing in every engagement, putting his troops to ignominious flight, slaughtering them by thousands, yes, barbarously butchering both women and helpless infants; pressing their victorious arms upon the very walls of Jerusalem, entering even the sanctuary, and defiling the hallowed courts of the Most High, laying hold, with their profane hands upon the *Ark* of the Testimony, the last hope of Israel, and carrying it away into captivity with the remaining sufferers whose blood had not been drunk by the ruthless sword. Or, the immediate vengeance of God executed without an intervening instrument. The destroying angel with his desolating sword lifted up at once over the whole land. The pestilence, the very sound of whose footsteps are death, entering every dwelling and marking for its victims every age. Ah, death without a moment's warning, folding in his icy embrace the young and the fair, the strong and hale, as well as the weak, infirm, and old, and with one vast sweep

consigning to the grave thousands and tens of thousands in a single hour.

Which of these could the afflicted monarch choose in preference to the others? They were each, the utmost overflowing of vindictive wrath. They each threatened the last extremes of desolation and woe. In what a terrific dilemma was he placed! How distressing, how thrilling to every fibre of the heart the alternatives which he is offered! *I offer these three things, chose thee one of them that I may do it unto thee. Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.*

But what must be the still more distressing condition of him to whom no alternative is given? Of him against whom vengeance is denounced without a choice of evils? Of him to whom the deprivation of every good is in judgment decreed, and the consequent infliction of evils without a remedy? Ah, of him, to whom long-enduring, long-provoked and offended justice at last issues the mandate with the unalterable decision subjoined, — *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayst be no longer steward?* Here there is no choice, no alternative left. While the summons is irresistible, the sentence of reprobation has been already determined.

In a series of sermons we have been endeavouring to enter into a strict and critical

reckoning with ourselves upon those subjects of which God shall one day exact an account of us as his stewards. It has been our object to anticipate this account, and by adjusting it with our consciences, by foreseeing all the possible dangers of the Divine disapprobation, to avert from us that tremendous trial surrounded with lightning and flames of fire, and to be prepared through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to expect with confidence, at the last, not the displeasure, nor the frowns, but the eternal approbation of our Judge. While we have examined, weighed, and investigated our use and improvement of the blessings of God, we have seen, at every step, the choice of life and death set before us. Yes, on each an alternative has been inscribed. Upon our life and being, our mental faculties, means of information and knowledge, health, friends, children, parents, property, reputation, opportunities of benevolence, sources of religious instruction, ability to instruct and improve others, a time of probation, the dispensation of Divine grace, through boundless mercy in the institutions of a church, with its ordinances and privileges for the securing of eternal salvation; and even upon the afflicting chastisements of heaven: and an acquaintance of our duty in each of these has presented to us the choice of all that was desirable. Ah, while we entered in-

to that severe and close reckoning with ourselves, which gave our consciences no chance for escape, and while we trembled at our manifest abuse of the talents with which we have been entrusted by God, we never ceased to discover that an alternative remained—*either* instead of perseverance in our unprofitableness and neglects, an opportunity was left for repentance and amendment.

Our third general head is, the *times* and the *manner* in which God calls us to this account. These are the times when he addresses the unfaithful soul, whose day of grace is at an end, in language like that of the text—*Hear is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.* Here there is no alternative, no choice of evils for the miserable reprobate. He may, indeed, when he sees that his day of reckoning has come, and that his doom is irrevocable, plunge deeper into crime: but this increased insanity and desperation shall only add fuel to the flames which are about to consume him. Language has not the power to express the horror of that soul who feels the approach of her Judge, who, conscious of a black list of sins and offences, washed away by no atoning blood, unmitigated by any faith and repentance, has no hold on hope, and knows that her accounts can be cancelled but by

the pains and torments of perdition. God grant, my brethren, that you may never know this horror by the dreadful experience of it. O may none of *us* be called by God to account to him in his anger for the repeated and wilful abuse of his favours. From such a reckoning, certain and hopeless condemnation must ensue. Let us attend then with fearful anxiety to the times and the manner in which he *does* call the unfaithful and hardened in disobedience to such a reckoning.

There is not a day passes, my brethren, in which we may not witness this fatal catastrophe with some miserable sinner. Heaven's mercies are infinite, but divine justice cannot always slumber, and sin persisted in must take its course, produce its effects, and result in remediless ruin, as certainly and inevitably as successive draughts of poison received into the system must ultimately produce the dissolution of the body. Ah, do we need arguments to be convinced, do we need information to know, when and in what manner the Almighty says to the impenitent wretch, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward?" "Give an account of thy life and being, *for this year shalt thou die! set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live!*" O terrible word of resistless power! O annihilating summons of implacable justice!

It is when that life and being have been devoted to none of the purposes for which they are designed. When they have been long and unrelentingly prostituted to the basest ends. When they have been made a curse instead of a blessing to society—trifled away in the vanes of folly, given to the sport of every capricious passion, and dedicated to the sole service of the grossest earthly idols.

This wanton madness is every hour arraigned at the bar of eternal Justice, and sentenced to expiate its crimes by a forfeiture of its blessings. Mortal existence is suddenly and unexpectedly terminated. The scene of life is closed, and the eyes sealed in the darkness of the grave in a day and an hour when the passions flowed to their full, and the remembrance of being accountable to a superior power was totally obliterated from the mind. Thus you often see those depraved beings whose days are one continued round of vice and folly, and whose life, if everlasting, would be but an eternity of sin and shame, prematurely cut off from the land of the living, and called to render their final account. Thus you often see those thoughtless youth, whom no precepts of religion can influence, and no dictates of prudence restrain from heaven-daring defiance of danger, plunged instantaneously, by some unlooked for event, into the night of death

The momentary excitement of an animal—a wave—a breath of wind, decides their fate. Thus you often see those covetous worldlings, who not only transcend every principle of right, but undergo any hardship, and encounter any pearl of life, for the sake of sordid gain, meet their end at the eve of the acquisitions for which they so ardently panted, and are buried beneath the ruins of the heaps which they themselves have accumulated. Thus you often see the servants of pride, revenge, and a vain ambition, who, in the phrenzy of their excitement, consent to sacrifice their lives to these demoniac passions, taken upon their own election, their destiny decided in the way which they themselves had chosen, in the very act of their crime and contempt of the highest mercies of heaven; and the means by which they had aimed at the destruction of a fellow-being turned into the instrument of their own untimely death. Sin and punishment are simultaneous. How, with the rapidity and the unerring precision of a shaft of lightning to the point where directed, are the summons and the sentence issued and executed. “Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.”

And thus again do you often, indeed, see the disciples of sensual gratification overtaken

with mortal ruin. Deadly poison can never be extracted from the cup of sensual pleasure. It is a constituent part of it. And the more frequent the draughts, the more eager the indulgence, the sooner and more sure the destroying effects. Witness those forlorn and pitiable sons of intemperance, who, regardless of the great design of their life and being, wanton them away with a brutal indifference. How long shall these unjust stewards sport with and squander the riches of heaven? Not perhaps a year, a month, a day. Their *grand account* is adjusting, and the balance of death about to be struck against them. God takes them at their word. They imprecate his wrath. Inch by inch they are cutting from the thread of their existence. That existence shall be fearfully terminated at the very period they are apprized of its value, and their portion on this earth taken from them ere they have lived out half their days. Such is the almost perpetual occurrence around us. By this mournful destiny of a sin more pernicious than even criminal, are stupid and reckless mortals swept daily from the stage of life, and buried in the dark and unsearchable abysses of eternity. The infinitely holy and perfect God, in calling them to this awful account, manifests his displeasure at the abuse of his gifts, and vindicates the jus-

tice of his requirement. "That we should live *soberly*, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

The times and the manner in which God exacts an account for the abuse of mental faculties, are often not less distressing. When this abuse has become a confirmed and determined habit, and when it is without bounds or restraint, he may force the sinner to a reckoning, in which wrath only shall be displayed, and every blessing, even life itself, shall be taken from him.

On this subject, christians themselves have every reason to fear the divine judgments. If they have neglected the means of cultivation and improvement, of those means they may forever afterwards be deprived. If they have devoted the vigour of their intellects solely to the business of this perishing world, to worldly affairs, those intellects may be inflexibly chained, and they shall never have that spiritual strength and penetration necessary to descry for them a skyey path to the gates of paradise. If their mental energies are allowed to sleep, God may increase their sleep. He may allow them to die. He may decree that sleep to be unto death. Such is the *natural tendency* of every faculty of the mind. Unimproved, it languishes and dies. Thus in every slighted blessing, we shall hear the voice of our Creator and

Judge "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

But if this is the severity with which professed christians are called to an account by God for the *disuse* or *improper application* of their mental faculties, how much more fearful are his judgments upon those miserable wits, whose *abuse* of intellects, impiety and profanity, cry to heaven for vengeance. An Apostle has told us in what manner they are called to an account in this world.—"They are," says he, "given over by God to a reprobate mind and to believe a lie, that they might all be damned." What profane sinner can contemplate this sentence with composure? What person who prostitutes his mental endowments, the richest and most splendid grant of heaven, to selfish, sordid, and worldly purposes, and who devotes no share of them to the objects for which they were given, the acquiring a knowledge of the will and the ways of the incorruptible God! Often does this fatal execution of wrath take place before our eyes. Every faculty of the mind is perverted: the most acute discernment is permitted to see nothing correctly. And where this judicial blindness has fallen upon the reprobated unbeliever, you may try forever to make him feel the force of the plainest and most simple truth, but in vain;

“If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?”

More than once have I met with a practical illustration of this melancholy fact—too many times I have seen unbelievers, even when prostrated with disease and pain, stripped of every earthly comfort, and shivering on the very brink of eternity, who, having spent their lives in deriding the holy religion of their Saviour, seemed to possess minds which were a perfect night, which were as dark as the caverns of perdition into which they were sinking. I have witnessed the evidences of the christian religion and its promises and threatenings urged upon them, in a manner so clear and convincing, that they could not resist their force, and were deprived of one word in reply, and yet the real effect was no more nor greater than would have been produced upon the senseless stone.

With another class of infidels, the account, if possible, is still more dreadful. Their hearts are hardened and their souls steeled against repentance, while their agonizing eyes are opened to anticipate those gulfs of despair into which they are about to be plunged. Nor less in the end, that of those who devote all their intellectual talents to the service of any earthly divinity. When once the sentence is passed, “Ephraim is joined to idols, let him

alone," their condition is without a remedy, and they shall never wake from the delusion in which they are wrapped, till they are about to appear at the final judgment. Manifested still more obviously, is the execution of divine displeasure upon those who make their appetites their God. By a course of sensual indulgence, every faculty of the mind is daily weakened and blunted, till at last its whole powers are exhausted or completely deranged. Mental alienation is the result, and hence, it has been ascertained that three-fourths of the wretched maniacs who people our lunatic asylums, are the victims of intemperance. Sometimes, indeed, the worldling is visited by the same judgment, driven to real madness after having willingly distracted his mind with earthly cares.

Thus does God require of men the most fearful account for the abuse of his favours, saying to each, in chilling accents, "Give an account of thy stewardship," and for the misapplication and brutal use of thy mental faculties, thou shalt be deprived of them forever. Let every one addicted to any of the vices which have been named, be awakened and alarmed with an apprehension of this dread sentence. Let him now seek, and strive, and labour, to repent and reform, before it shall have gone forth against him. Then the time of re-

penitence will be over, and the mercies of God in Jesus Christ shut up forever. O God, send out thy light and thy truth, and let them turn the feet of the perishing sinner unto thy holy habitation.

Now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N X V .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

"Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

We continue our reflections upon the times and the manner in which God calls mankind to this fearful account. In numberless instances, the commission of sin is its most severe punishment. Thus the divine judgments are simultaneous with the act of transgression. In other instances, and as an awful warning to all sinners, the demand of an account at the tribunal of heaven, has often, like lightning, reached the offender in the very commencement of his crime. Uzzi had no sooner stretched forth his impious hand to lay hold of the ark of God, than that hand was nerveless in death. Scarcely had the covetous spirit of Gehazi been gratified in receiving the gifts from Naaman, for the recovery of his leprosy by the man of God, before he went out from the presence of his master, a leper, as white as snow. Ananias and Sapphira conspired to tempt the Lord by lying against the Holy Ghost, but no sooner were the words of their

falsehood uttered, than they fell down dead at the feet of the Apostle. And,

Though the divine judgments are not always so sudden and terrible, still the evils which accompany slighted mercies, are too often without remedy. Too often the unfaithful steward has not one wretched resort to repair his misfortunes left him, but is compelled to relinquish the privileges of his office in hopeless disgrace and despair.

Frequently is this the condition of those who have abused the means of information and knowledge, with which heaven has blessed them. The sources from which they might have derived forgiveness, are forever dried up, and the residue of their lives doomed to be a miserable and fruitless lamentation for past favours, never to return. Innumerable are the cases in which the justice of God executes this sentence upon the guilty, and calls them to their final account, with regard to his contempt of blessings. It is well for them, if one single source of knowledge is not closed—that of the means of repentance and forgiveness, through the unfailing mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

The severity of divine justice, in the case before us, is an ample solution of the difficulties which may at any time rise in our minds, with regard to the dispensations of an overrul-

ing Providence towards those wretched people, who seem to be past the hope of recovery, from their delusion and errors. Why, we may often ask, are multitudes permitted to be led astray by the grossest absurdities?—permitted to think themselves sincere, in blinding their understandings against the clearest truths of the Gospel, and in embracing the most palpable and impious heresies? Why is it, that in a land of universal light, where the evidences in favour of the christian religion are as strong as the rays of a meridian sun, there can be people so absolutely senseless and stupid, as not to perceive the force of them, and so vitiated in every intellectual faculty, as to imagine that even the shadows of reason are to be found in unbelief? The divine judgments upon the heathen world, as related by St. Paul, remove all mystery in answer to these inquiries, which might otherwise exist. *They did not choose to retain the knowledge of God, and therefore, God gave them over to blindness and a reprobate mind.* Exactly the same may be the condition of many in every age, of many at the present day. For their abuse of the means of true wisdom, they are permitted to be actuated by strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, and finally perish.

Who, and how many are sentenced to an incurable blindness of this kind, for their con-

tempt of the blessings of information and knowledge, we shall never know, till the day of the last great account, because we know not how many divine mercy may arrest and reclaim upon the very brink of destruction. But we find among the most hopeless infidels, those who have once been favoured with the best means of being enlightened by the truth, and among the most incorrigible fanatics, those who have, perhaps, once been members of an orthodox church. They neglected to improve till the patience of God was exhausted.

Every person ought to be tremblingly alive with concern, lest the same should be his own calamity. You know not how soon your blessings slighted, may be turned into curses. Delity not to improve the means of knowledge which are afforded you. Alas, how many thousands and tens of thousands are suffered to build their hopes of salvation upon a foundation, which must disappoint them at the last. Wisdom cries continually, but they will not hear. At length, her voice is hushed. They are permitted to feel themselves secure in the delusions which they had fondly cherished, and the knowledge which they did not love, is forever hid from their eyes. It is their day of reckoning. *Judgment slumbereth not.* Consider, how many you know and see continually, who, during life, fasten their expectations of

heaven upon some shallow principle which, if the word of the living God be true, shall avail them nothing, and who die as they have lived, indicating only, by the darkness of their minds, the certainty of their perdition. You know not how soon your own accounts may be brought to the same crisis. You know not how soon the Holy Spirit may depart from you, and leave you to an ignorance that shall prove your sure destruction. If you neglect for one moment, to improve diligently all the means of true knowledge within your power, the very next, they may be taken from you forever. O then, "awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead." Hasten to improve thy blessings, knowing, that the time must come, when the sun of mercy shall go down and we may say in vain, like the rejected Jews, who had contemned the richest favours of heaven, and whose fate was unalterable, "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*"

Melancholy too, is the manner in which the careless and inconsiderate sinner, often is called to account for the abuse of health. When this gift of God has been trifled away, with no regard to the interest of the giver, sacrificed to the most iniquitous purposes, immolated in scenes of dissipation, or even estimated at so insignificant a value, as to induce no concern for its preservation, nor any reluctance in put-

ting it at stake against the most worthless objects to be thought of. It is then, that crime and punishment are blended and become inseparable. Very often is death the award of such temerity and folly—and the least to be expected are, the pains and diseases of a broken constitution, miserable, wretched decrepitude and infirmity. It is thus that God says to that thoughtless youth, who wantons away his health, and the flower of his days, in the paths of immorality and vice, "Give an account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward." Health and happy days shall no more be enjoyed. Sickness, without a hope of recovery, and presenting continually the terrible prospect of death to thy affrightened view, shall be thy companion through the remnant of thy earthly existence.

Under similar visitations of exhausted mercy and insulted justice, will you find many, very many, of the children of worldly covetousness, of pleasure and licentiousness, of intemperance and dissipation. You will hear from them, sighs and regrets without end, the most bitter reproaches upon themselves for the folly and madness of their lives, when, alas, to retrieve the evils of the past is impossible, and they are without a disposition, perhaps, to do so, were it in their power. Ah, yes, I have more than once seen the wretched man, who reviled

his own follies, and cursed the vices to which he was addicted, and who, yet obstinately refused to be reformed, or to dash from his lips the poisonous cup, which he knew was emptying the last remains of a destroyed constitution, and feeding with fresh fuel those quivering fires, into which he was hastening his guilty soul.

No one knows to what state of desperation his habits of sin may drive him; and no one can even conceive of the horrible condition to which the reprobated soul is reduced, given over by God, and the restraining grace of His Holy Spirit withdrawn. Guard then with fear and trembling, against the incipient stages of sin. Guard with a lively jealousy against its most trivial deceptions; and think not that you are safe from them a moment, while you place not a true estimate upon every blessing of heaven, and improve it not to the utmost of your ability. Surely, warnings upon this subject cannot be wanting, nor the traces of divine displeasure fail to be visible. If mutilated limbs, deformed bodies, premature old age, bent down to the ground, debilities and diseases without number, a world of misery, do not admonish effectually the careless and stupid sinner, and do not, from these marks of vindictive justice, terrify him into a better mind, the very stones of the street must be ready to

cry out against him. Let them irresistibly persuade you to devote all your health to the service of that blessed Saviour *who hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows*—that Saviour on whom was laid the iniquity of us all, and in whom the weary and heavy laden, the most miserable and wretched, may find rest, peace, and eternal health.

For the abuse of friends, it is only necessary to remark, that God calls the unfaithful steward to an account, and passes the sentence of rejection upon him, in deprivation by death or by some other dispensation of his providence, equally distressing. There is no blessing, of which the repeated and wilful contempt does not provoke the divine displeasure, and may not even in the present world and in the face of astonished mortals, draw down the most signal judgments of heaven, uttered by this denouncing requisition, *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

What frightful language must this be to those unfaithful parents, who have never, in the fear of God, discharged one duty towards their children, or once considered them a gift of heaven, for which the strictest account would be exacted. It is heard in all those calamities which are their mutual affliction. It is heard in judgments upon both parent and child. In all the evils which befall the one, and become

the grief and anguish of the other. How emphatically then, in the unkindness and heartless disregard which change the character of a child, to that of an enemy and a monster, disowned as the outcast of heaven and earth. Still more emphatically in the message of death. Our memories are the record of too many dispensations of this sort, which in multiplied ways, testify the abuse of the blessings enjoyed. Ah, the heart aches to recall them to mind, and to awaken the painful recollections of bereaved parents. But it is well for us never to forget that it is the abuse of mercies which deprives of them.

Why has death snatched from your arms that infant offspring, in whom all your heart and hopes were centred? It was because you idolized, you adored the gift, and forgot the Giver. And why has *your* child, after he had passed the dangers of infancy, and seemed fast ripening to maturity, been taken away by the same iron hand, which has forever blasted your fondest expectations? It has been, because you were not bringing him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, because you abused the blessing with which heaven indulged you—if not in every respect, yet in some particular instance, which would have produced fatal consequences, and therefore, in mercy to your offspring, and in judgment with you, God

has by death deprived you of your stewardship. The distress and horror of the divine visitation, upon those who are called to witness the deaths of their children, already advanced to years of maturity, and yet expiring in sin and impenitence, perhaps hurried out of the world in a moment, and leaving no grounds to hope that they exchange the present for a better state, chills the life blood of the heart. If we have feelings, reflection upon these, must excite them. Let them cause our unceasing prayers, and our sleepless diligence and concern.

The times and the manner in which children are called to this account, are not dissimilar to those we have remarked of parents: but it is here, that the judgments of God are most signal. The abuse of the blessing of parents seldom fails to meet with its merited punishment in the present world. And the fearful examples of divine indignation against this sin, which are every where recorded, should teach all children, that there is neither safety nor hope one hour for those, who do not reverence, honour, and obey, as the representatives of God to them and their greatest earthly blessing, their parents. Often is it the terrible language of the Almighty, to the froward and perverse, *'Thou ungrateful and wicked child, death shall deprive thee forever of that parent, whose life*

through thy unkindness and disrespect, is a perpetual scene of sorrow. Give an account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward. Thou who knowest not the value of a father or a mother, shalt no longer possess the blessing, only to abuse it, but shalt learn the enormity of thy sin by eternal separation.

This, however, is not the sum of the evils which the disobedient child may expect. Neither their own life, nor any other blessing is promised to those, who disregard this first duty of nature. All is forfeited; and the event in a thousand instances, shows the implacable anger of Divine Justice. Ask now, what were the character and conduct of the great majority of those young persons who have been cut off by an untimely death, and you will learn that they were of that unhappy number, who dishonour who are disobedient to their parents. Ask what is the cause that such a person is pursued by calamity and misfortune through life? Why nothing that he undertakes prospers in his hands? Why a direful fatality seems to follow him, and to forebode a woful termination of his existence? And if the truth can be found out, the sad story will be told, that he is pursued through life by the vengeance of heaven, for that greatest of sins, the abuse of parents.

See then, what every ungrateful and wicked child has to expect at the hands of God. To

be deprived of parents—to be left an orphan—to have his own days shortened, and his life cut off from the earth. Or if permitted to live, to live only to suffer the strokes of Divine vengeance—to terminate existence by some dreadful catastrophe, and at last to be sent down to dwell with *everlasting burnings*. Pray, then, and strive day and night, to be kept from this great offence. Pray for divine grace in Jesus Christ, to enable you in all things to honour your parents, without which, no one can honour the Lord God.

And now to the Father, &c.

S E R M O N X V I .

ST. LUKE, XVI. 2.

" Give account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

In prosecuting our inquiries into the times and the manner in which unfaithful stewards are called to this account by God, the next subject before us, is, that of *propriety*. With what composure can the covetous worldling, he whose hopes and enjoyments are all centred in the things of time, which he possesses, hear this parable of the blessed Saviour. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, Thus will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then, whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

That this is a representation of real life, and

the terrific event with the unbelieving and impenitent soul, whose God is the world, the Saviour has assured us in the declaration, "so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." We are here showed when it is, that the Divine patience can endure no longer. When both the Giver and the intent of the gift are forgotten—when the views of the man have become invincibly sordid and selfish—or, when earthly substances are prostituted to any and every purpose, rather than that of doing good to others, then it is that the judgments of God are preparing for the destruction of the possessor. He may, indeed, seem for a while to be so strongly entrenched, that no disasters can successfully assail him; but it is only the weakness of our conceptions and the folly of his own heart which deceives him to believe, that his mountain is immovable. As sure as there is a God, so sure shall his sentence upon the wicked be executed, and that notwithstanding the innumerable precautions of worldly prudence.

Where is the vain man that supposes himself secure in his worldly possessions for a single moment? Ah, unless you use this world as not abusing it, unless, as a good and a faithful steward, you devote your property to the end required by the Gospel, the judgments of heaven shall, at the appointed time overtake

you. The wisdom of a Solomon will avail you nothing. You may eat your bread and drink your water with trembling and carefulness; you may make the most judicious provision, the most prudent investments; you may guard with the keenest forethought against all possible dangers; and yet your insurance shall prove worthless. *Yes, you may dig deep and descend into hell, thence shall God fetch you up; you may ascend as high as heaven, thence shall he bring you down.* He holds in his hand a thousand instruments, one of which is sufficient to accomplish your ruin by divesting you of every particle of your possessions. When such shall be his decree, you might as well hope to silence the fury of the storm, or to check the mad waves of the ocean, as to be able to concert any measure to save yourself from destruction. In the sorrowful condition of neighbours and friends, in the broken fortunes, bankruptcy, and beggary of thousands around us, do we see and hear the requisition issued and the sentence executed, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

But every one who places his heart upon the things of the world, and perverts the design of the gifts with which he is blessed, has reason to fear a more dreadful reckoning. The judgment of deprivation is often a disguised mercy.

But for him who lays up treasure to himself, and is not rich towards God, for him who is absolutely inhumaned in the stupidity of covetousness and selfishness, the time at length arrives when there is no mercy, and the message of the text is aggravated into more awful terms. *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.* Let every person who is blessed with the things of this world know then, that his greatest security in their lasting enjoyment, is an application of them to the purposes for which they were bestowed. Yes, the remembrance of their Author, and of *his* command, "While we have time, to do good unto all men, and especially to those of the household of faith," shall be a perpetually safe insurance, while that of bolts and locks, worldly wisdom and prudence, are none at all. Often in the first generation, most frequently in the second, and inevitably in the third, the abuse of riches, and the effects of ill-gotten gains are their total loss. But in either, or all, a sudden and untimely death may close the account, and vindicate the justice of Heaven. As it is here that we are in a more peculiar manner the stewards of God, so it is here that his judgments upon the guilty are most conspicuous. And let us know and remember, that, with regard to the things of the present world, there is in most instances but one step between us and eternal perdition.

But reputation and property are most intimately connected : more so, indeed, than they ought to be, and the former is far too dependent on the latter. It is in vain, however, to think of rectifying all the errors of the world, till there is an entire renovation of human nature, and those which have always prevailed, and among all classes of people, are likely to continue. Wealth must, and will give influence to the possessor,—will give more brilliancy to his virtues, and more effectually varnish and cover over his vices and defects. The reputation of the rich, therefore, is more powerful than that of the poor. For this reason, perhaps, the divine judgments are not less severe upon the abuse of reputation than upon the misapplication of riches, and the same withering blast, the same grave of expectation and hope, is at once assigned for them both.

Refuse your name and your influence to the cause of virtue and religion, lend them to the encouragement of vice and immorality, and before you are aware of it, the world itself shall deprive you of them, and your character shall become odious even with those miscreants upon whom your favours have been lavished. They who have been supported by the countenance which you gave them, and thus screened from the punishment which they merited, shall be the first to point towards you the finger of de-

restation and scorn. Make the reputation you have acquired, the object of vain glory, forget from whom you have received it. conceive that by it you are something more than human, and can now safely become the artificer of your own happiness and prosperity : and some fatal reverse, some direful mortification, and perhaps some sudden and appalling death shall be the speedy catastrophe of this self-idolatry. "The angel of the Lord smote the proud Herod, when elated at the applause of the multitude, "he gave not God the glory, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." What a lesson to every ambitious and vain-glorious man, who, in the pride of his heart and the giddiness of his beam, becomes insensible of the Author of his blessings. Ah, we see often that the veriest trifles are the desolation of such persons. In nothing are you secure for a moment without a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. Make this the guiding star of your destiny, or a single breath may submerge you in an ocean of infamy, from which there shall be no power of redemption, whatever your calling and whatever you profess.

Similar to what we have been considering, is the manner in which God enters into judgment with all those illiberal, unkind, inhuman, and savage souls, who, instead of improv-

ing their opportunities of benevolence to the good of their fellow-beings, employ them in acts of cupidity, of hatred, malice, and violence. The means of their mischief are taken from them, and they are forced to feel by their deprivations, the avenging power of Divine justice. Human laws are here made, in many instances, the instruments of punishment. But where the penalty of human laws does not reach the offender, that of the Divine law will. In the same place where Ahab had spilt the blood of Naboth, did the dogs lick his own blood. Fire from heaven descended and destroyed the men who would have arrested the man of God. The wild beasts from the wilderness devoured the children who mocked, instead of blessing the prophet of the Lord. Desperation drove the traitor Judas to immediate self-destruction. And perpetual blindness sealed up the eyes of Elymas, who opened them only to conceive mischief against the way of righteousness.

With whatever means you are blessed for doing good, employ them diligently to this end, and know, that if you neglect to do so, you are in continual danger of being deprived of them in such a way as shall embitter the remainder of your days. But if you employ them for purposes of evil, most assuredly the curses of incensed Heaven shall fall upon your devoted

head; there is no possibility of escaping its judgments. O then, flee, like Lot, for thy life, stay not in all the plain, but escape to the mountains. Awaken and devote every faculty of body and mind to the service of thy Redeemer,—to promoting both the temporal and eternal good of those who are the purchase of his most precious blood.

Our fears are constantly excited for those who slight, abuse, and condemn the sources of religious instruction with which they are favoured by an indulgent heaven. What its judgments are upon this sin and wickedness, “We have seen and our fathers have told us.” Daily are we forced to be the unwilling observers of depravity ripening for punishment. We meet with it wherever we go, and we are sometimes compelled to witness it even in the house of God. Consider what multitudes there are on every side us who disregard this sacred day, and spurn from them every offered means for enlightening their benighted minds. The church and the people of God are their terror. But, alas, do we not sometimes see those who enter within these hallowed walls, as irreverent, as careless, and indifferent as if they were in a play-house? What astonishing thoughtlessness! Can such persons have the least idea that they are under the dread Majesty of Heaven, that the church of God is

the place which he sanctifies with his more immediate presence, and that for every sermon which is here preached to them, every chapter of the Bible which is read, every prayer which is uttered, and every psalm or hymn which is sung, they must render an account to Him? If they were impressed with this fearful truth, never would a smile or an irreverent look escape from them. Ah, pardon me, my brethren, but do not these forget the sacredness of the christian temple, or, at least, forget where they are, who ever allow themselves to fall asleep in this holy presence of the most high God?

While an account must be given at the last for the abuses of which we are speaking, God's own summons to this account in the present world, is often tremendous. Where now are many who would esteem attendance on public worship the greatest earthly blessing, but who, when they enjoyed that privilege, considered it of no value, attended but occasionally, and when they did attend, paid little heed to what they heard? They are upon a sick-bed, where they may, perhaps, linger for years, but shall never be raised; or they are removed to some distant and uncultivated part of the country, where no church is reared, no christian friends convene, and no sound of the gospel is heard. Alas, where are many others who would give worlds, had they them at command, for the ad-

vantages of one of those Sundays which were spent by them in idleness, and in refusing to receive the religious instruction which was proffered them? They are in their graves. They are in the invisible world, where they have learned, alas, too late, the inestimable value of the blessings which God bestowed upon them. And remember, I pray you, that in this awful manner may God say to every one, who in the least degree slights or undervalues the instructions of the sanctuary, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Equally alarming is the message of judgment to those who bury in the earth their ability to instruct and improve others. Does God say of that careless, lukewarm, and listless congregation, who regard not the exhortations of his servant, "Remove the candlestick out of its place, and leave them in darkness?" He says also of that worldly-minded, unsanctified, or cowardly preacher, who fails to dispense to his people the words of everlasting life,—Let calamities, affliction, and distress overwhelm him, let feuds and animosities spring up in his own house, let the talents which he abuses be taken from him; ah, let death close the career of that ungodly minister who lives but to dishonour the christian name. Fearful judgments of a righteous God! And all, my

brethren, who neglect the talents which are given them, and do not, to the utmost of their ability, endeavour to remove the darkness and ignorance around them, and to instruct and improve the minds of those whom Providence has placed under their especial charge, may well tremble in apprehension of similar punishment.

Can we conclude, then, in any better manner than in beseeching Almighty God, our heavenly Father, of his infinite mercy, to grant us the constant illumination and guidance of his Holy Spirit, that we may know and do all that is required of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now to the adorable and incomprehensibly glorious Supreme, three persons and one only-wise God be thanksgiving and praise everlastingly. Amen.

S E R M O N X V I I .

ST. LUKE XVI. 2.

Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.

And when shall this be the judgment of God upon those, who, in the abuse of all his favours, waste their time of probation, spend their day of grace in violating his laws, and blaspheming his name? When shall this be his judgment upon all the irreligious and impenitent, upon all the slothful and idle? Well may we make these inquiries, as being deeply interested in the event. Ask then, yourself, my friend, how and with what diligence you are improving your time of probation, and by the reply of your conscience, judge of what you have to expect at the hands of God. He has said, that his spirit shall not always strive with man. There is a point in the life of every individual, beyond which, Divine forbearance will last no longer. The sun of mercy is hidden forever, the clouds and the tempests of wrath gather, and the night of despair draws its shades thick around.

Would you know how much you are in danger of this destiny, and how soon it may over-

take you, go to the bed of that dying sinner, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unclean thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace." Hear his groans—witness the agitation, the distress, and the terror of his mind. No message of mercy, by the minister of Christ, can abate his fears, or inspire him with hope. No promises of the Gospel, no prayers nor efforts of charity, can close from his view, a gaping hell, or open to him the doors of heaven. Time once was, when all the riches of immortal blessedness were spread out before him. Time once was, when all the comforts of a God of mercy and goodness, were at his disposal. Long did the Divine Spirit strive in vain. Long did a bleeding Saviour knock for entrance at the door of his heart. Equally to no purpose were both indulgences and chastisements, again and again repeated. Every mercy and every call of Heaven have been abused and profaned, and the whole day of grace dissipated in guilt and impenitence. Time of salvation is now over! The sentence has gone forth against that worse than barren fig-tree, *cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* The darkness of death, whose horrors are rendered unutterable by the prospect of eternal misery, of which they are the prelude, embraces him.

Every man or woman, every careless and unthinking soul, who wastes the allotted time of probation in the vanities of the present world, is in danger of this terrible rejection. Not for a day, have you the promise of life, nor that the period of mercy shall be prolonged. On the other hand, a speedy termination of earthly existence is threatened to all the impenitent: and you see this threatening verified in the notices of deaths contained in almost every paper you read. Alas, how many more, who now feel secure in sin, shall soon, unexpectedly find themselves at the close of their mortal career: shall, while they are flattered with hopes of long life, hear, in the termination of their day of grace, and in their exit from the scenes of time, the stern and inexorable demand of insulted goodness, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Would you then, my friend, enjoy the present life, would you obtain any reasonable assurances of its continuance, would you flee from death, and from the destiny of living out but half your days, surrender yourself this hour to the religion of Jesus Christ, and devote your life to a diligent keeping of his precepts. Thus only are you safe from the terror and disaster of a sudden and untimely end.

Could the voice of the tomb become audible,

the mournful history of the divine Judgments upon those who have abused mercy, and spent their day of probation in consummating the perdition of their souls, would never cease to ring in our ears. What have we to anticipate for thousands still living? When we see their apathy and indifference, their devotion of the precious period of mortal existence to any thing, rather than their eternal salvation; when we see among these our fellow-labourers and friends, perhaps a more relative or connection, what language can give flow to our feelings, or express our emotions of sorrow and concern? Ah, what christian heart does not bleed, in apprehension of the approaching day of divine retribution! Ponder, my friends, intensely upon these thoughts, and let the fear of the eternal misery of those around you awaken all your diligence, zeal, and efforts to pluck them from the verge of destruction on which they are hanging, and to save them as brands from an everlasting burning. Improve your day of grace to the great purpose for which it was given you, and, as far as your influence can be made to extend, impress others with a sense of the irreparable misfortune, of their trifling away their life-time in the paths of folly.

Upon the times and the manner in which unfaithful stewards are called to their account.

for the abuse of the blessing of God, in Jesus Christ, through boundless mercy in the institution of a church, with its ordinances and privileges, for the securing of eternal salvation, much might be said,—volumes might be written. The whole history of the church on earth, of the dispensations of Providence, the whole history of the world is little else than a recital of the Divine judgments, upon this sin of mankind. Why the tremendous wrath of heaven exemplified in the destruction by the deluge? Why that of consigning the whole gentile world to utter darkness and ignorance? Why the vindictive displeasure of God, written upon the countenance of every forlorn Jew, wandering over the face of the whole earth, homeless, and a stranger in every nation among whom he sojourns? It is the abuse of boundless mercy. In the institution of a church of God in this lower world, heaven is brought down to the earth, and all the treasures of an eternal, immortal kingdom are bestowed upon men. What words, therefore, can express the madness and impiety, the sin and guilt, of slighting such an inestimable blessing. Is it not strange that the Divine forbearance should endure so long? But the period does at last arrive, when this abuse awakens the execution of wrath, and incorrigible offenders are called to an unspeakably terrific reckoning.

The most signal judgments upon the world from the creation to the present hour, have been for the punishment of this sin - have marked the displeasure of God against the abuse of the spiritual blessings of an earthly sanctuary. The day of tribulation commenced with the Jews soon after the crucifixion of the Saviour, and it has never terminated. That with christians less now in many instances been less severe. Of all the mighty labours of the apostles, in planting the church throughout the eastern hemisphere, where can you, at this period of time, find a remaining vestige. Where now are the seven great churches of Asia, to which St. John addressed his apocalypse? Long since has the mosque usurped the place of the christian temple, and the polluted adoration of a false prophet, that of the worship of Jesus. And in most parts of Europe where the name of christianity is still preserved, little of its spirit remains. The abused light of heaven seems to be withdrawn. As gross idolatry and more determined atheism are fostered there, than prevailed with the gentile world before the advent of Christ. Alas, my brethren, our own now happy country seems to be too rapidly preparing for similar judgments. To be deprived of the Divine illumination, and to be plunged into the dark abyss of atheism. Ere long will the contempt

of the favours we enjoy hasten us to this dreadful reckoning.

"From him that hath not," from him who improves not his blessings, *"shall be taken even that he hath."* In many more instances than we might at first be inclined to believe, is mental blindness a Divine judgment. You shall see it in that enthusiast, who treats the forms and ordinances of a visible Church with utter disdain. In the heat and phrenzy of his imagination he despises what the commandment of God has made most sacred, and in the pride of unsanctified depraved nature chooses to consider himself the resource of his holiness independent of the institutions of Christ, that to feel much is to create a heaven within his own bosom, and to be guided by the Holy Spirit of truth, even in acts forbidden by the revealed word of God! And for this abuse and disregard of the plain and positive declarations of the Gospel, God calls him to an account of his stewardship, by giving him over, *to eat of the fruit his own way, and to be filled with his own devices.* His feelings become the infallible rule of his conduct, and he is carried from one extreme to another, continually tossed by contending and irreconcilable principles, the longer he lives the victim of more hopeless error, like a deserted

vessel in the midst of the ocean, driven by the fury of the storm.

You shall again see the same truth exemplified in that member of our own apostolic communion, who allows himself to suppose that visible union with a true church, and an observance of its outward forms and ceremonies, is a sure warrant of salvation. This is no character of fiction. Alas, it is to be feared that there are some such people, in almost every Episcopal congregation, whose opinions and sentiments are the opposite extreme to those of the enthusiast. In *their* religion, the heart, the feelings, are permitted to have no share. They are convinced from the best evidence in the world, that our own church, whatever others may be, is the true church of Christ. That this church was organized by him and by his apostles under episcopal rule. In other words, that there were in the apostolic church, three orders of the ministry, bishops, presbyters, and deacons. That these have been preserved by a direct line of succession from Christ, so that the person who is ordained by a bishop of the Episcopal Church, derives his authority as immediately from its great Head, as if he had been ordained by St. Peter or St. Paul. From equal evidence they are also convinced that the doctrines and worship of our church are the same as were the doctrines and

worship of the primitive church. They are, therefore, absolutely certain of being members of the true church of Christ; and upon this certainty they ground their hope of salvation. They thus make that the substance of the thing sought, which was designed only as the means of obtaining it. Of the necessity of a living faith in the atoning blood of the cross, and of an entire change and sanctification of the heart, the will, and affections, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, without which no member of the visible church of Christ has any reason to hope for salvation, they are altogether insensible and ignorant. And their blindness is often made their punishment. Take those Jews, who, in all their hardened stupidity and unbelief, boasted of their being the seed of Abraham, and whose sentence of condemnation was, that *seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not understand*, they are permitted to die under the delusion in which they have lived. Or they are sometimes found to renounce one error in order to embrace an opposite, equally aside from the truth, and from frigid formalists to become over-heated fanatics. As we fear the judgments of God, may his grace enable us to shun both these rocks and these quicksands.

In concluding this division of our subject, let us now inquire when, and in what manner God may demand from us an account of our

stewardship for the abuse of his providential chastisements. If there is any case more hopeless than another it is this. When the correcting scourges of heaven are disregarded, they must surely terminate. "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Under every afflictive dispensation, we are either improved or made worse. If the latter it is the immediate judgment of God for the abuse of his mercy. In this condition, he carries us to the calm and prosperity we desire. But this calm is the presage of an eternal rest, and the departure of the Spirit of the Almighty shall be the unalterable seal of perdition. With deep concern, then, brethren, let us reflect upon the manner in which we have received these dispensations of Providence. Can we call ourselves to the account not knowing how soon God himself may enter into judgment with us, and sentence the slothful servant to outer darkness.

But judgment is yet delayed. We are to reflect, that, since the time of commencing this subject of the steward's reckoning, no one of our number has been summoned to his last account at the bar of heaven. May it not be the case till each one has adjusted that reckoning to the satisfaction of his conscience and his God. May it not be the case till each one has

repented truly of all his past offences and laid them at the foot of the cross. But, during this short period, how many do we know of, who have been by death called away, and the character of whose account is now fixed and settled for the ages of eternity. What would have been the nature of yours, my dear hearer, had this call been addressed to you? Alas, how soon, how very soon it may! Leave not, then, to chance the disposition of your destiny. This moment, this day, make your peace with God, knowing that to-morrow you may be summoned to the tribunal of heaven. O may the eternal Spirit assist you, and prepare you.

Now to the Father, &c.

SERMON XVIII

CONCLUSION.

ST. JOHN, VI. 68.

"To whom shall we go."

The spiritual nature of our Lord's discourses offended the grovelling, earthly minds of his hearers. The severity with which he reproved their sin and unbelief, and the wisdom with which he detected their false professions of sincerity, drove them from his presence. The duties which he enjoined were too rigid and too self-abasing :—showing the weakness and corruption of nature, they manifested the continual necessity of Divine aid, and that through the fulness of grace in an incarnate God ; and when these things were enforced upon the sensual and worldly, who had professed a belief in him from impure and sinister motives, *"they went back and walked no more with him."* It was upon this occurrence that he said to the twelve, *"will ye also go away?"* "If the truths which I have taught you, are not received, and the practice of the duties which I have enjoined is burdensome, if ye are not sensible of

your need of my instructions, and of your lost condition without me, ye also can leave me." But Peter, as if the Divine word had, with resistless power, fixed its influence upon his heart, replied, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* He seems to have felt the truth in all its alarming force, of there being but one resource for the wretched, and to have spoken in a tone of lamentation, fearing that even this might be denied them, *To whom shall we go?* What else is left us, if refused access to the Saviour of the world?

Well may this same disconsolate inquiry be made by each of our fallen race. To whom shall we go? Where shall we find light to remove our darkness? comforts to relieve our despair, medicines to heal our wounds, atonement to repair for our sins, and life, where all is death? With the deepest anxiety for the final result of our reckoning with Divine justice, *the necessity of this inquiry, the false expedients resorted to, and the one true resource,* will readily receive our earnest attention.

A sense of the necessity of the inquiry, "To whom shall we go?" must be created in the breast of every person who examines the extent of his moral obligations, and his poor and imperfect discharge of them. The laws of God are all founded in the eternal and unalterable rectitude of his character, and no other

obedience to them is required, than that which is perfect and absolute. Any allowance for failings and deviations, or any favourable admission of partial obedience, would indicate imperfection in the Divine nature. Such an idea is incompatible with the character of a righteous God. His requirements must be peremptory and positive, without the least abatement for the infirmity of a fallen and polluted nature. You find them to be such. You find his word to be, "Do this and thou shalt live, but if not done, thou shalt die." And you find upon examination, that in every thing required of you, you have come short. Yes, let it be what it may, the same charge of sin lies at your door—you was born a transgressor; and instead of having wiped away the stains of original pollution, by a life of purity and entire obedience, every act of your life has partaken of the sin and imperfection of your nature.

God is all goodness and love. He requires nothing which is not reasonable and just. Having constituted you his steward, he has endowed you with the riches of his grace, both with regard to the things of the present world and that which is to come, and he exacts from you in return, only the faithful discharge of the duties of your office. But when you inquire of your conscience, how far his reasonable re-

quirements have been complied with, or, in how many instances, there has been a faithful and strict performance of all that was obligatory to be done, you receive the trembling response, that you are justified in nothing, that in your best deeds you are an unprofitable servant. Ah, yes, that you are a guilty, a condemned sinner—that there is not a single case where your accounts would bear the scrutiny of Divine justice—that you have every reason to fear and be afraid, that abused mercy will provoke vindictive wrath, and that the tremendous sentence of exhausted goodness will be speedily issued and executed, *Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

In the judgments of God upon individuals, and upon the world, you see an exemplification of his inflexible justice, you see this doom of transgressors to take effect beyond the hope of remedy. What then if *you* were to be summoned before the bar of God? What then, if *you* were this moment to be called to your final reckoning? There is not one act of your life which you are sure would meet with the unqualified approbation of your Judge, but there have been a thousand which you are convinced, and know, must richly merit his everlasting displeasure. And the longer you live, the longer your day of reckoning is deferred, the

more aggravated, from the frailty, weakness, and perverseness of your nature, the character of your account becomes, and the more alarming must be your apprehensions.

This, brethren, is the state of excited fears, to which our minds must be wrought, when we enter into an account with ourselves, and compare the tenour of our lives, our performance of the various duties of our callings and stations, with what God most justly requires at our hands. If we believe in his authority and his right to exact our obedience, we believe also we see and know, that on our part, there is an awful defection and deficiency, that we have in nothing, come up to the standard of perfection which he has prescribed, and that we therefore stand impeached and condemned before him, and have every reason to expect the vials of his indignation to be poured out upon our heads. Pressing and momentous the inquiry, "To whom shall we go?" What shall be our resort? What shall shelter us from the wrath to be revealed? What shall relieve the despair of our minds, and dispel the fears with which we are oppressed? *To whom shall we go?*

Shall we resort to the dreary caverns of infidelity and atheism, where unbridled passion and deeds of horror steep the mind in midnight darkness? There you may find some

partial and temporary repose. There you may shut out the light of heaven from your understanding. But your relief shall be but the deceitful calm which precedes the desolating tempest. Your slumber shall be to awake in the devouring fires of perdition. Ah, such shall not even be the length of your repose. The execution of vengeance and the agonies of hell, are often anticipated in the death-bed scene of an unbeliever. Tortured to the depths of despair he bursts the chains of mortality, to realize the bottom of that gulf, which his conscience forebodes. How miserable the purchase of a few short days of partial and disturbed quietude! How poor a recompense for the pain that must follow! To whom then shall we go?

Shall we try the abodes of pleasure, and in its enchanting scenes, its alluring mazes and sylvan bowers, hope to obtain a lethean draught which may forever close the remembrance of what we are, and what is our destiny. This may be the case for a while, but neither the slumbers of recollection, nor the spell of pleasures, is of long duration. While the latter vanishes, the interruption of the former awakens ten-fold terrors in the mind. Perhaps the disease has been rendered incurable by the emollients which have been administered. Such is the least to be expected from the pursuits of

pleasure. To whom then shall we go ? Shall we repair to the world as a shelter from the tempest, and a covert from the storm ? In the pursuits and cares of that, in its prosperity and smiles, shall we find indeed a lasting heaven ? In these we may forget that the Almighty is just, and that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. While these are uninterrupted we may indeed repose in a fatal security. But their duration is soon at an end. If reverses do not change the scene, loss of health, sickness, and death must inevitably do so. Then, every dependence is broken, every source of confidence has failed, and wretchedness and woe become irreparable. Such is the world ! To whom shall we go ?

Shall we have recourse to the lights of science and philosophy ? Enticing pursuits to the inexperienced admirer of self-sufficient human wisdom. But what relief to the alarmed sinner, whose eyes are opened to see and to feel his true condition, can these afford ? Can they atone for his transgressions, or show him how his repentance may effect this object ? Can they rectify the infirmity of his nature, or yield him any aids, by which he shall be able to do, in every instance, for the time to come, what he is commanded ? In a word, can they give him one assurance of forgiveness or of life eternal ? No. These things are wholly out

of their power. All the philosophy and science in the universe can do no more than render the darkness visible with which mankind, respecting spiritual subjects and the events of eternity, are surrounded.

To whom shall we go? Shall we go to any other earthly object which is able to satisfy our minds? Alas, there is none such to be found. There are those which may produce the effect for a moment, but it is only because we choose to be deceived: and this can last no longer than while the judgments of God are slumbering and death remains at a distance. But that is of short duration. Troubles and afflictions will arise, and the time of death will not delay. It is here that all our fears are alarmed, and no human expedient is sufficient to abate them. We see that we are dying creatures, we see a frightful eternity open before us. To *whom* shall we go? Whither shall we fly? What rocks and mountains shall we call upon to fall on us, and hide us from the presence of that just and righteous Judge, whose goodness we have insulted and abused, and from whom our guilty consciences forbid us to hope for further favours. *The day of his wrath is come. To whom, to whom shall we go? where, where shall be our resort?*

There is one to whom we may go. We may go to Christ. Hark, distressed soul! Hear

that voice of mercy, sweeter than the tones of angel's harp, which breaks the silence of the tomb, and dispels the darkness of despair,—*Come unto me and I will give you rest.* Here is our refuge, our protection and hope. In all the fears, the difficulties, and dangers with which we are oppressed, we may go to Christ and obtain everlasting relief! Afflicted through the infirmities of our nature, the imperfection and sin which are our birth-inheritance, we may go to Christ for restoration to more than primeval holiness. He has borne, and he will help, both our infirmities. By his blessed Spirit may we be washed, and sanctified, and justified, in both body and soul. Entering into an account with ourselves, finding that we have in no particular come up to the just requirements of God, we may go to Christ for a full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction, oblation, and atonement, for all our sin, all our disobedience, and defection.

On the cross was an expiation made whose value is more than that of worlds. Yes, the sum of the Saviour's merits, through the shedding of his blood, worlds can never compute. By this infinite treasure, the immense debt, which, in your reckoning with Divine justice, is set down against you, may be paid and cancelled. His sufferings and death are an eternal offering for millions of lost sinners,—an eternal mediation

for their life, their peace, and pardon. Go, then, to him, and he shall be your surety with God the Father, both for the past, and for the future. Yes, have you fears for the time to come, do you feel yourself to be carnal and sold under sin, while the law is perfect, just, and holy, go to Christ, and he shall be a perpetual atonement for all your imperfections and failings. Nay, more,—he shall give you the grace of his Holy Spirit, by which *you can do all things*, can “walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” The King supreme and eternal, all rule, all authority, and all power, are committed unto him. Go to Christ, and he shall support you in every trial and temptation of this mortal state. He shall be forever your Intercessor at the right hand of the throne of Heaven. He shall secure and perpetuate your peace with the justice of the Father, he shall enlighten your mind, and strengthen your heart with the joyful hope of a blessed immortality, he shall be your friend and your guide through the valley and the shadow of death, and shall conduct you beyond them to an entrance through the gates of that paradise, which remains eternal in the heaven of heavens.

Of whatever blessings you stand in need, either for the present or for a future state, go to Christ, and you may obtain them. *He has*

the words of eternal life. In him is infinite fulness. All the riches, the treasures of the incomprehensible Triune God. And here, afflicted soul, shall not your every desire be satisfied? Here, unhappy, unfaithful steward, cast in your own reckoning, condemned by your own account, have you not discovered the great resource for which you have so long and so anxiously sighed. To whom else would you go? You have found him of whom Moses and the prophets did testify. Him who is chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. And can any of us, brethren, require exhorting and admonishing, in order to love and to adore this Saviour, or to devote ourselves, body and soul, and spirit, to his blessed service? He bears all our burdens, performs all our duties, merits all our salvation. Ah, who can know such a Saviour, and yet refuse to go to him.

But let us remember that we must go in faith, with full confidence in the power of his grace, full reliance upon the efficacy of his all-atoning blood, believing that he is very God of very God, able to do and to perform all that we ask at his hands. *Able to save to the uttermost all who come to the Father through him.* If we have not this faith, our case is like that of the idle multitude who followed him from curiosity, or to be fed by his miracles. But if our faith be true and sincere, if the burden of

our sins is laid at his feet, if our devotion to him be unreserved and entire, there are no favours too great for us to ask or to expect from his goodness and love. Our union with him has commenced. Our immortality is begun. We shall never die. When the days of our pilgrimage are finished, we shall sleep in the Lord, we shall rest from our labours in the arms of Jesus, our Saviour and God.

Here, then, the steward's reckoning is closed in his favour, and to his endless joy. Through the blood of the cross, not only is satisfaction made for all his defalcation and sin, but an eternity of glory becomes the balance of his account. "Shout hallelujahs to the Lamb who hath redeemed us."—Who hath paid the infinite debt to the claims of omnipotent Justice, the price of our ransom.—Who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us meet to be inheritors of his everlasting kingdom. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, three persons and one God, be unceasing ascriptions of thanksgiving and praise, now and throughout the ages of eternity. Amen.

S E R M O N X I X .

NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND
CIVIL GOVERNMENTS.*

ST. JOHN, XVIII. 36.

“ My kingdom is not of this world.”

If there is one consideration which more highly recommends the religion of Jesus to the cordial acceptance of all mankind than another it is the truth which his words here communicate, that it is a religion of eternity—that it is not of this world. That its concern is not with the perishing objects of the earth, or with the transitory affairs of time. And if, among all the characteristics of heaven, with which christianity is inscribed, there is one more prominent than another, if, amid all the proofs of its divinity, there is one more irresistible than another, it is this pervading truth, that the kingdom of Christ *is not of this world*. That it is a kingdom purely spiritual. A religion which not only disclaims all connection with temporal greatness, indignantly rejects every secular appendage, and looks with disdain upon the pride, the pomp and the power of the

* Preached during the general excitement respecting Sunday mails.

world, but even holds them in view, as her deadliest enemies.

Thus divested, arrayed in the simple garb of truth and virtue, and guided by the purity of divine principles alone, christianity commenced her progress upon the theatre of human existence, and has made her way to universal triumph over the hearts of men. Other religions have sought the protection of human authority, have flourished by the support of human power and declined with their failure. But the christian religion has increased in her strength, when opposed by the authority and power of the mightiest kingdoms and empires; yet has withered by their nursing, and has most successfully flourished, when entirely removed from their influence. With every attentive observer, therefore, is her divine character vindicated, both by her progress and by her decline. By both, the eternal truth of the Saviour's declaration, "*My kingdom is not of this world,*" has been, and shall, through every age, continue to be demonstrated.

With no little profit and advantage to ourselves, brethren, may we devote a few reflections to this truth. Consider the certainty of the fact which it announces, the reasons for it, and the propensity to, and the folly of, an opposite hypothesis.

The certainty of the fact appears both from

the text and from every part of the New Testament! That the religion of Jesus Christ disclaims and rejects all dependence upon, and all connection with any secular power or authority. Most repeatedly did he himself inculcate this upon his first disciples, and required of them to teach others also the same: and there is not a syllable in any of his precepts, or in those of his inspired apostles giving countenance to the supposition that his religion can, in any manner or shape, participate in the concerns of civil government. If such was the case, his kingdom would be of this world. Instead of being a spiritual and eternal, it would be an earthly and a temporal kingdom. What injustice to the Divine Saviour is a bare suggestion of this kind. Christ is a spiritual king. His subjects are all spiritual subjects. His religion is altogether and wholly a spiritual religion, and has nothing to do with the affairs of the world. Therefore he said, "*now is my kingdom not from hence.*"

The reasons by which this truth, in all its varied bearings, is enforced upon us, are so numerous, so plain, and so irresistible, as to create the greatest astonishment and surprize, that the human mind, blessed with an ordinary share of intelligence, could ever become insensible to the fact. Look for a moment at the stupendous mission upon which the Son of

God came into our world, and you will see how infinitely beneath, and unworthy of his regard, must be all the pomp and splendour, or all the authority and power of mortals.

He came to recover an apostate race from their rebellion, and to restore them to their allegiance and to the favour of their Almighty Sovereign. To redeem and change them from all that they were, and all that they had been—to raise their minds from earthly to heavenly objects—to take them out of the world, and to translate them to a kingdom of immortal glory. This great purpose is the sole end and object of the religion which he has left with mankind. To have participated, therefore, himself in human rule and authority, or to have consented that his religion should participate, or in any shape become blended with earthly power would have been to frustrate the whole of his glorious design—would have been to disregard the honour of his Eternal Father, and, instead of reconciling men with the justice of his laws, and reclaiming them from their rebellion, would have been to sanction their perseverance in it. For what are human laws and civil governments, but substitutes for the laws and government of heaven?

Man, before his fall and depravation, while in a state of rectitude, required no other rule for his actions than the will of his God; and

when perfectly restored by the grace of redemption in Jesus Christ, any other is as little necessary. Any other power or authority is rejected as unworthy the notice, and beneath the high considerations which influence his conduct. Yes, as assuming the grand exclusive prerogatives of the supreme God. To free man from the control of every other power, and restore him to the sole guidance and influence of his Creator's authority, was the entire aim of the Saviour in all the institutions of his religion. But to have assumed a temporal power, or to have suffered any combination of that religion with the arm of human authority would have been the riveting eternally of those very chains, which he came into the world to break in pieces—would have been to make man the everlasting slave of the pomp and circumstance of the world—the everlasting and irreconcilable enemy of heaven.

These truths were well understood by the chief adversary of man, and we find, therefore, in the history of the temptation, that *the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them*, were presented to the incarnate Son, as the grand and all powerful allurements to divert him from his great purpose of redemption. But they passed unnoticed, both from their worthless insignificance in the view of divine wisdom, and from their being the centre of opposition to the

plans of Heaven's mercy. This opposition we shall find to be a prevailing principle of civil governments. The kingdoms of this world are, and have ever been hostile to the kingdom of Christ. And they shall persist in this hostility, till by the annihilation of the principles by which they are supported, by the subversion of their authority and laws, they become merged in his kingdom. When all shall know the Lord from the greatest to the least, and man, ceasing from sin, shall require no other statutes to direct him, than the precepts of the Gospel, and no other ruler to control him than his sovereign Creator and Redeemer.

Many of the principles of christianity may, indeed, be engrafted upon those of civil government, and many of the enactments of that may be in accordance with the laws of the Gospel, and many a civil magistrate too, may be truly and sincerely a disciple of Christ, but all this will not change the original inherent character of civil governments. Where was there ever one such government, the great body of whose officers were truly and sincerely the disciples of Christ? Where was there ever a civil government that took the Gospel for the standard of its measures, either with the world or with its own subjects? No where. It would be a kingdom divided against itself, and could not stand. It would cease

to exist, surrendering its authority at the foot of the Cross.

The powers that be are indeed ordained of God : and so is the tempest, the volcano, and the earthquake. So was the deluge. So were the desolating armies of Cyrus and Alexander. So has been the authority of all the despots by whom the world has ever been scourged. These powers are evils whose necessity originates in the sin of mankind. By the goodness and mercy of heaven, they may be controlled and overruled in such a manner as to become a general blessing instead of a curse, just as the thunderstorm, whose every shaft has the power of carrying death and destruction to the defenceless inhabitants of the earth, may, by the superintending care of Divine Providence, only clear the atmosphere of its pestilential vapours, and invigorate the face of nature. But all this affords not one particle of evidence, to show that *the powers that be* are congenial with the spirit of christianity, or that civil government is other than a necessary evil ; necessary as long as men remain sinners, and, on this account, permitted by God, though opposed in its very nature to his own righteous empire.

The empire of God will be universally re-established by the religion of his Son. And the merest novice in this religion cannot fail to see

that its whole spirit and tenour is unlike the genius of civil government, or the power and authority of the world. This religion inculcates and enforces upon all its disciples meekness and gentleness, forbearance, humility, and forgiveness, an unbending honesty and integrity, and in every imaginable instance prohibits violence. The only arms which it authorizes for its support, and by which it is to prevail throughout the world, and to triumph over the opposition of millions of sinners are the arms of *persuasion*. And what timorous, doubting, and faithless soul can conceive that more is required for its universal success, when that persuasion is brought home to the heart and conscience by the omnipotent spirit of the living God? In reliance upon the resistless agency of this spirit, how contemptible do all the power and aid of mortals appear. But where is the harmony between the christian religion and the power of the civil arm? Between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world? No matter what their form, monarchical, democratic, or varied between them, their power is the same. Its necessity, as before intimated, arises out of the sin and corruption of the human family. It is built up by violence or artifice, and by these weapons it is sustained. All human governments depend upon the power of the sword

for their support, and without that power they are inevitably dissolved. So when "the nations of the earth shall learn war no more," those governments will cease to have a being. Hence, they, in no instance, harmonize with the christian religion.

There never was a greater or more fatal error conceived in the world than that of the Jews, in their idea that the Messiah was to reign as a temporal and earthly prince. This occasioned their rejecting him in the character in which he appeared. This excited all that persecution which stained the earth with the blood of so many of his disciples. And this provoked those judgments of heaven which multiplied upon them the most dreadful calamities, which overthrew them as a nation, and which have pursued them even to this day with unrespite'd vengeance.

But this desperate error was not peculiar to the Jews ; it is an error which has, in some shape or other, entwined itself about the heart of many a professed christian. An error which under different disguises, both individuals and churches, have most tenaciously maintained. They have thought the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Christ *might* harmonize. That religion, and the civil government might be united in one, and the former partake of the splendour and power of the latter, and thus

Christ become virtually enthroned as an earthly and temporal prince. No age or place has been exempt from this error, and where its infatuated views have succeeded, where the church of Christ has become combined with, has taken the sceptre or put on the ermine of earthly power, the tears of angels could but faintly express her moral desolations. Here has christianity sustained the most lasting and most irreparable misfortunes. All the other evils she has ever suffered are trifles of no account in comparison with these. Indeed, the rage of an infidel world has but brightened her banner; but here her purity never fails to be tarnished, and her very spirit extinguished. Christianity left to speak for herself, repels the patronage of the prince or the senate. She flourishes best uncultivated by human art. She is never in danger from the violence of an open foe. It is only in the house of her friends that she can be mortally wounded. By the officious meddling of worldly wisdom, and the undue kindnesses of mistaken or false-hearted disciples—by wounds thus received have churches in every age bled and perished. And yet with these pictures of weeping misery before us, while religion is still bleeding and her wounds not healed, there are always those who profess, and who verily think themselves her friends, that in their blinded zeal would

force her naked bosom upon the point of the same deadly weapons.

The corrupted current of the human propensities invariably inclines to flow in the same channel. Among these propensities no one has been found more universal or more invincible than the love of power. A love of the influence, the trappings and the splendour of secular greatness. This inveterate passion so effectually blinded the first disciples of Christ, that after the most plain and repeated assurances to the contrary, still they believed his kingdom must embrace an earthly dominion. And even when it would seem that these their hopes, should have been extinguished forever by his death upon the cross, and that they would, in his resurrection, have seen clearly that his empire was spiritual and heavenly, yet we find that to the very last hour of his being with them upon earth, the love of worldly glory agitated their breasts, and when he assembled them to behold his ascension from the world, to the incorruptible throne of his Father, they eagerly inquired of him, "*Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?*"

The same has been in all ages, and is even to the present day, the incurable passion of multitudes of injudicious people, called disciples of the cross. Notwithstanding the many

positive assurances which christianity gives of her disapprobation, notwithstanding her whole spirit revolts at the suggestion, and notwithstanding the history of all the calamities which have befallen her religion, from this cause alone, still they would, if possible, form, in some way or other, and inseparable union between that and the secular power. It is still the ardent wish of many a heart, “*Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel.*” Wilt thou in *some* sort reign as a temporal prince. Wilt thou in *some* manner clothe thy religion with the power of the world. At least, let the authority of the civil government interpose to protect the sanctity of thy Sabbath, and thus become, in *some* measure, the nursing father and mother of thy church.

Ah, to christians imbued with the spirit of the world, these notions appear very fine. They always see vast advantages to the christian religion, in the closest union of church and state; and so, no doubt, the first disciples conceived that immense blessings would result from Christ’s reigning as an earthly king. Poor worms! Exalting their own wisdom above that of Heaven. The heart sickens with pain to behold such delusion existing, as is sometimes the case, under all the appearances of the deepest sincerity and of the most fer

vent zeal for the honour of the Redeemer's cause in the world.

If any of you, my brethren, have been led to cherish views similar to these we have been deprecating, know that they are the last and most subtle devices of saſan, by which he would deface the glory, and sap the foundation of pure and undefiled religion. Spurn the lure, as worthy only of the deadliest enemies to the christian name. Suffer not yourselves to be insensible to the high claims of your religion. Forget not that its character is heavenly and eternal—that it connects you with the immortal God. Degrade it not, then, by an association with the loftiest objects of this polluted world. No never. Never, till you can reconcile your minds to the foul blasphemy of worshipping the prince of darkness, for the sake of possessing the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, do you lift a finger to sanction the slightest connection of christianity with secular power.

And now to the Father, &c.

22214

252J
C549

Clark, W.A.

The steward's reckoning

252J
C549

22214

